

Howard Staunton (born 1810, died 1874, resurrected on Twitter in 2016) has generously agreed to conduct a rencontre for the ECF monthly communiqué. The titled and noble chess writer Mr Timothy Wall journeyed to London's celebrated chess salon, Simpson's-in-the-Strand, to meet the undefeated World Champion (1843-2020), renowned Shakespearean scholar, raconteur and gigglemug. You can follow Mr Stanton's informed views on chess on Twitter (@HowardStaunton).

TW: Mr Staunton, we are deeply indebted to you for sharing your informed views on the most noble of games with the readers of the English Chess Federation's Gazette. To what do you attribute your vigour that has enabled you to remain astride world chess like a colossus at the sprightly age of 210?

HS: Strictly observing the two-metre rule since 1874.

TW: It is beguiling that you have chosen to resume your illustrious career in chess journalism through the medium of Twitter, a mere 141 years since you penned your last column in *The Illustrated London News* and went to meet the great arbiter in the sky. Pray, what induced you to stage your comeback/resurrection? Was it somehow to challenge another fine warrior of the chessic quill, Mr. Leonard Barden, who has surpassed even even your longevity as a chess columnist for *The Evening Standard* and *The Guardian*? Do you have confidence in demanding satisfaction from Mr Barden in an arm-wrestling contest?

HS: Comeback? In reality we have never left the stage. Chess immortality continues to fill the vacant hours which we might otherwise spend less wisely. It is not commonly known that Leonard began his career in journalism 'ghost-writing' columns for us in the early 1870s, and we take intense pride in our protege. Long may the grim winner of that most chequered of all games - the game of life - withhold his final move from the boy Barden.

TW: You have accumulated a deep vault of chess knowledge since your more active years on the London tournament circuit. In your humble opinion, who is the greatest chess author - David Ionovich Bronstein, with his beautiful Russian prose in *The Chess Struggle in Practice* (Zurich 1953 Candidates) or the old Dutch Master, Jan Hein Donner? Or, pray tell us, perhaps you think it is yourself?

HS: Mr Bronstein was heavily indebted to Mr Vainstein for his prose, whereas the Dutch curmudgeon was a scribbler of the first rank. Donner mixed his ink with vitriol but tempered his blade with a humorous playfulness that almost disarmed criticism. Hein sends the following greeting, by the way: 'Hello, unreliable Brits! How's Brexit going?'

TW: Do you approve of Mr Carlsen, Mr Nakamura and their butter-upon-bacon friends playing these 'online' benjos? Do you favour the subtle positional niceties

of the noble Norwegian champion, or do you prefer the brash cat-lap style of the American challenger? How do you rate their pre-move mouse skills and their handling of modern timepieces? In the days when you were at the peak of your health and chess prowess, would you be enthuzimuzzy to test your skills against these two skilamalinks?

HS: To draw together a large assemblage of Chess players and offer prizes open to public competition is unquestionably best for the advancement of the game. Mr Carlsen and Mr Nakamura are players of undoubted genius, both remarkable for the energy and daring of their attack, as well as for the rapidity of their conceptions, and both somewhat apt in their eager application of the sword to throw away the shield. Whether either could match the might of Staunton is a question too invidious for public answer. Better address your mouse skills question to a cat.

TW: Local wood-pushers have described you as Bang Up to the Elephant. With that in mind can we perchance touch upon a rather unsavoury matter. A certain Mr Short, formerly of the County of Lancashire and latterly lodged in the old stomping ground of Lord Byron and the Elgin Marbles, has claimed he is the greatest English player of all time. What say you to this podsnappery?

HS: Witness our erstwhile Twitter joust with Bolton's Aristotle: Mr Short: 'I don't know who you are.' Mr Staunton: 'I am the finest Chess-player England has produced.'

TW: Howard, me old China (if we may be a tad chuckaboo), we now move onto Count Vladimir Kramnik of Zurich, who has posited that Caissa's ancient game could be much improved if castling were to be repealed, and the more genteel previous form of the game restored. Would you agree with this charming suggestion from the latter-day champion of Muscovy? Or do you consider this to be merely a devious plot?

HS: No, 'Mr Staunton', if you please. We are no great admirer of new varieties of Chess, believing the ordinary mode of playing the game to be morally unimprovable. We advise Mr Kramnik to study our *The Laws and Practice of Chess* before he again ventures to impugn the integrity of our noble game.

TW: Let us delve into the delights of your seminal classic of modern chess theory, *The Chess-Player's Handbook*, published in 1847. We are mystified that your Magnum Opus does not give consideration to the Poisoned Pawn Variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, and indeed it humiliates the whole concept of the Caro-Kann as that ridiculous opening invented by some yet-to-be-born oik from Newcastle. Will you now be updating your meisterwerk and publishing CPH II for an appreciative audience in 2020? And will you be using Stockfish or Leela to analyse the positions?

HS: To quote Mr Fischer, the doyen of that variation of the Sicilian Defence: 'Staunton was the most profound opening analyst of all time. Playing over his games I discover that they are completely modern.' *The Chess-Player's Handbook* is unimprovable and forms a better Staunton monument than a tablet in Westminster Abbey. All chess calculating machines are the work of the Devil.

TW: Who, in your opinion, flaunted the most magnificent mane, tresses, locks, beard, moustache, toupee or other impressive follicular structure among the all-time chess greats? Was it yourself (Mr Mutton Chops) with your own lustrous handlebars; Mr Steinitz's nesting beard; Mr Speelman's werewolf chic; Mr Nepomniatchi's mellifluous man bun, or perhaps even Mr Williams' glorious gingeriness?

HS: Herr Steinitz was the original 'Ginger GM' whose red whiskers far outgrew and outshone the young pretender's. In recent times few have surpassed Mr Yusupov for dogged hirsutiness. Long hours perfecting the 'Rasputin' look at Mr Dvoretzky's salon led to several acclaimed books on the subject, such as *Beard Grooming for the Tournament Player*, *Secrets of Whisker Preparation and Attack and Defence: How creative hair styling develops in a chessplayer*. His sensational *Boost Your Beard* (Goatee Chess, 2011) was the deserved winner of the coveted English Barber Federation Book of the Year Award. Mr Caruana's burgeoning lockdown Afro has impressed but he needs to devote more time to developing a fully rounded face fungus styling repertoire. Bubbling under; Peter Heine Nielsen.

TW: Let us address the perilous state of English chess amid the modern-day plague of Coronavirus. Delving into your vast expertise of Victorian parlour games, how can we rescue the game from its present-day vicissitudes? And should we be playing on <http://chess.com> chess24 or lichess?

HS: Promoting the Evans Gambit in schools is a very important project, for which the English Chess Federation has shown little enthusiasm. Another vital area of concern is the recent decline in standards of tailoring, aggravated by the World Champion's lockdown slovenliness. Cravats, waistcoats and top hats should be worn in all club matches and tournaments. At no period in history are so many facilities afforded for Chess. Practical experience is obtainable in the public rooms, day and night. Those who celebrate the progress of Chess might hail its source; the railway I created has produced the present number of travellers. To avoid such debacles as beset the final of the recent Chess Olympiad we recommend that future matches are conducted by electric telegraph.

TW: We would like to thank you, Mr Staunton, you are undoubtedly the most famous person to have graced the streets of Kensal Green (although we concede there is a dearth of competition). Should you choose to play in one of Mr Raof's Golders Green tourneys or the IV Nations Chess League, is there some way we could recognise you in your 21st century incarnation? Will you be sporting a trendy door-knocker beard, a sleek pair of gas-pipes - or perhaps you will be carrying a treasured first edition of *Arkell's Endings*?

HS: Our neighbours Messrs Thackery, Trollope, Babbage, Collins, Siemens and Pinter find your ignorance shocking. We regret that our lack of mobility forces us to decline such kind invitations. The incognito of an amateur has the same claim to respect as that of the knights of old, who persisted in keeping fast closed the bars of their helmets. Sadly only Staunton's endings are in our possession.

Notes on vocabulary of Victorian English:

Gigglemug: "An habitually smiling face."

Butter upon bacon: Extravagance, and especially too much extravagance. For example: "Are you going to put lace over the feather, isn't that rather butter upon bacon?"

Benjo: Nineteenth-century sailor slang for "A riotous holiday, a noisy day in the streets."

Cat-lap: A London society term for tea and coffee "used scornfully by drinkers of beer and strong waters ... in club-life is one of the more ignominious names given to champagne by men who prefer stronger liquors."

Enthuzimuzzy: "Satirical reference to enthusiasm."

Skilamalink: Secret, shady, doubtful.

Bang up to the elephant: This phrase originated in London in 1882, and means "perfect, complete, unapproachable."

Podsnappery: This term describes a person with a "wilful determination to ignore the objectionable or inconvenient, at the same time assuming airs of superior virtue and noble resignation." (Forrester)

Me old China: Cockney rhyming slang. China (plate) = mate.

Chuckaboo: A nickname given to a close friend.

Door-knocker: A type of beard "formed by the cheeks and chin being shaved leaving a chain of hair under the chin, and upon each side of mouth forming with moustache something like a door-knocker."

Gas-pipes: A term for especially tight pants.

Source: <https://theweek.com/articles/567412/56-delightful-victorian-slang-terms-should-using>