



ECF Awards 2021

The following represents the citations made for the successful 2021 ECF award winners. Other than standardising fonts (where possible) and some light editing these remain as submitted. The winners are:

President's Award for Services to Chess:

Joseph Conlon
Andy Howie

Contribution to Accessible Chess

The UK Braille Chess Association

Contribution to Women's Chess

Lawrence Cooper

Contribution to Online Chess

Oliver Brennan

Contribution to Junior Chess

Uxbridge Junior Chess Club

Club of the Year

Camberley Chess Club

Congress of the Year

Cheney Rapidplays

Stephen Greep
Chairman, ECF Awards Committee
04/08/21



President's Award for Services to Chess

Joe Conlon (3 nominations)

Nominated by Anna Bishop



"The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible," wrote science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke.

In a Covid-19 world, where a return to over the board chess has seemed impossible for over a year, Joseph Conlon (Joe) has been a pioneer, turning an aspiration into reality for many juniors.

In October 2020, Joe was inspired to schedule an U11 junior tournament in Oxford. He was quick to recognise that 'supervised activities provided for children' were permitted under government regulations, with many young people having returned to sports, music and scouting. So why not a return to over the board junior chess under this remit?





Since then, Joe has shown his commitment to the cause by running four more U12 junior tournaments, between April and June 2021. Over 80 children have taken part in total, a third of whom are girls. The participants have ranged in standard from novices from local primary schools to multiple England juniors who have previously played internationally. Children have travelled from Manchester, the Midlands, London and the south of England to take part. As increased interest and enthusiasm have been generated (there were 46 participants in the 20th June 2021 tournament), so Joe has continued to innovate, adapting the model to split the juniors into subgroups named after famous chess players, with an all-plays-all format within each subgroup, and negotiating extra space in the school.

Credit for the success of the events must also go to Lucy Conlon (Joe's wife), who is there at every juncture, competently controlling chess matches and demonstrating organisation par excellence.



In a short space of time, with the help of a supportive state secondary school (Cheney) in Oxford, Joe established his blueprint: a large, airy building with multiple classrooms, a small number of chess boards in each room, and parents also subdivided into mini groups in different rooms. Risk assessments completed, covid disclaimers signed by parents, hand sanitiser standing proudly like an extra queen next to every board, the tournament went ahead on 24th October 2020. It was the first junior over the board, ECF-rated tournament since the start of the pandemic.

It would have been easy to keep all this a closely guarded secret. However, in the November 2020 ECF newsletter (#50), Joe summarised his experience for the benefit of others. Practical advice abounds in his report as does his humility. Since then, Joe has acted as an inspiration and pair of guiding hands for another parent, Wadih Khoury, to host a successful standard play tournament at the end of May 2021, at the same school.

It should also be noted that chess interest from the hosting secondary school has increased as a result of two of its pupils participating, with one of the teachers, David Smith, stepping up to re-establish a chess club and the prospects of a team, in a state school that has previously not had a chess focus.



Nominated by Michael Bryany.

My 2 children, Harry Bryant and Amelie Bryant have played in every one of his Cheney OTB events he has organised as the Covid restrictions slowly allowed. Mr and Mrs Conlon's events are always meticulously organised and as a junior chess parent his all play all format was revolutionary.

Joseph Conlon is always on hand with kind and wise advice, particularly for my 9-year-old son Harry Bryant.

These competitions were like a breath of fresh air for children that had been stuck in doors behind computer screens for 6-7 months. The positive impact this had for the children and Conlon's willingness to organise such events, when others were unable or unwilling to do so, should not be underestimated.

I hope the nomination is received favourably by the committee and I or my Children Harry Bryant 9 and Amelie Bryant 7 are available for testimonials or to put forward their view on how much they have enjoyed the Oxford Cheney OTB events.

Nominated by Alain Hanash;

I would like to nominate Joseph Conlon. Joseph was the first to create juniors OTB events after the lockdown allowing hundreds of kids to return to OTB competitions. His events were extremely well organized, safe and promoted social interactions between the kids including playing football and other outdoor activities. His events were both ECF and FIDE recognized. He managed to create teams by assessing both ECF & FIDE ratings and also looking at Lichess accounts. Those were amongst the best organized OTB events despite the current covid situation. He has created a website to help support this effort: <http://cheneychess.com>

Andy Howie (2 nominations)

Nominated by David Sedgwick

Andy Howie is the Executive Director of Chess Scotland.

Attached separately an interview which Andy gave to Mark Rivlin in January 2021, in which he set out his background in chess and his work in helping the ECF and the 4NCL since the start of the pandemic. In that interview he stated: “We have built stronger relationships between the ECF and Chess Scotland and long may that continue!”

I am nominating him for a Special Award for an exceptional contribution by a member of a neighbouring Federation as that seems to me to be appropriate. I set out below the details of that contribution.

Andy has been a member of the FIDE Fair Play Commission since 2014, but his involvement has grown considerably since the start of the pandemic. He has helped the ECF and English chess enormously in three ways in particular:

1. ECF Fair Play Regulations for Online Chess

When the pandemic led to a substantial increase in Online Chess activity, the previous Regulations were found to be inadequate. Andy contributed to the preparation of new Regulations, which have stood the test of time better, and he has served on ECF Fair Play Panels.

2. 4NCL Online

Andy has been an arbiter for the 4NCL Online and the Junior 4NCL Online since their inception in April 2020. Fair Play checks have been a significant part of his duties, but by no means all of them. On almost every Tuesday and Thursday when the competitions have been in progress, he has worked late into the night processing results. During April 2021 he was away in Yekaterinburg, Russia, as the Deputy Chief Arbiter of the Candidates Tournament. That did not stop him carrying out his 4NCL duties on the relevant Tuesdays and Thursdays.

3. British Online Championships 2020 – 2021

Andy was the Fair Play Arbiter for the Championships. He was working from morning until night on each of the 12 playing days. As with the 4NCL, he spent considerable time processing results, but at the Championships his principal focus was on the Fair Play aspects. He had to cope with a near deluge of unsubstantiated and mostly unfounded allegations, while at the same time ensuring that cases of genuine concern were fully and fairly investigated. He accomplished this with a remarkable degree of thoroughness and patience.

I am pleased to nominate him for the Award.

Note: In addition, the text of an interview with Mark Rivlin was appended as additional supporting evidence. As this has evidence of achievement,

Nominated by Alex Holowczak

He is Scottish and not an ECF member, but ... he has been heavily involved in fair play for the British Online Championship, 4NCL and other events. He got involved back at the start of the pandemic and was a big help - he is now indispensable in terms of providing fair play advice for a number of cases.



Contribution to Accessible Chess

UK Braille Chess Association

Nominated by Guy Whitehouse

Our role in the UK Braille Chess Association is to make chess accessible to blind and partially sighted people. We do this in a number of ways.

Tournament activity: the Braille Chess Association has a long track record of organising over-the-board tournaments for blind and partially sighted people. While this has not been possible during the pandemic, we invented a new format of tournament in which people could play using online platforms such as lichess, via Skype and by phone. One such event, featuring a ladder and a points-only competition, ran over the whole of last summer and included hundreds of games and another event organised on similar lines will run over the summer of this year. We intend to run these tournaments even when it is possible to restart over-the-board events.

We also run two email tournaments a year and a correspondence championship and league in which participants can play in braille, on tape, by phone or by email.

Accessible chess literature: this year we recruited a new reader who now records a selection of articles from Chess Magazine every month. We run a library of more than 300 audiobooks and our quarterly gazette is made available electronically, in braille, audio and large print.

Accessible equipment: chess sets sold by the RNIB were not of an acceptable quality. All of the adapted sets suitable for use in tournaments or even just for private use are the result of our initiative to find producers of accessible sets both within the UK and abroad. We have had to offer producers advice and feedback on changes necessary to sets to make them usable.

Recently FIDE authorised the DGT Echo for use in their tournaments. We have arranged for this clock to be reviewed by members so that an easy-to-use set of instructions on how to set the clock can be produced.

Encouraging involvement in mainstream chess activities: we seek to strengthen contact between our members and the mainstream chess community by organising email matches (we recently played Surrey in a match featuring more than 20 boards) and by offering grants to members who play in mainstream congresses. We recently changed our policy so that conditions for qualifying for this grant would not be affected by the pandemic.

Making chess software and platforms accessible: many visually impaired computer users operate a computer with screen readers such as Jaws and NVDA. Our website coordinator has developed a script to make Chessbase Reader accessible. We organise one to one tutorial sessions teaching members how to find their way round online chess platforms so that they can then participate in tournaments hosted on sites such as lichess.

Our suggestions have helped chessable.com more closely conform with web accessibility guidelines and a member of our association who is a diamond member of chess.com persuaded video presenters

to upload a .pgn file with their video. These text based files can be used by visually impaired people to help them more closely follow games and diagrams featured in the video.

Supporting Statement from Linda Whitehouse

I have been familiar with the Braille Chess Association and its work for the last 18 months and always found them to be an enthusiastic group, keen to promote access to chess – from beginner to elite level, and to support their 200+ blind and visually impaired (VI) members. Past projects have included schools coaching and the provision of accessible chess equipment to schools with VI units.

They source, adapt and provide accessible chess sets and talking clocks to members to enable as many blind and visually impaired people as possible to engage in chess, and ensure that a large library of chess books and magazines is available in accessible formats. Their desire is for blind/VI people to participate in chess on an equal footing with sighted people, and at the highest levels – actively supporting members to attend international tournaments by offering subsidised travel and paying for coaching and volunteer guides and personal assistants to attend and enable participation.

Since lockdown requirements, the BCA held email tournaments and correspondence chess events, as normal. They usually plan, organise and run 2 weekend and 2 week-long in-person events each year, which are greatly enjoyed; but owing to the pandemic, have been unable to hold over-the-board tournaments, organising remote events to replace them. In these events/tournaments, the games were played in real time. These friendly remote events have been popular and very much appreciated in these difficult times. In fact, even when over-the-board (OTB) events can resume, BCA will continue to offer more remote tournaments to meet demand.

In the last year, they held 2 remote weekend chess events/tournaments, in which players could take part in 3, 4 or 5 games over 3 days. They held a 3-week event in February, and a second TESSLa event - whereby participants play using various methods to relay moves: Telephone, Email, Skype/Zoom, Lichess and other online platforms. They are hoping to hold an OTB tournament in Harrogate in October, depending on the pandemic situation.

BCA also offer blind/VI people ways to participate remotely in AGM and face-to-face meetings if they are unable to attend in person, so they can fully participate in the organisation at every level.

Chess coaching to blind/VI members, including elite players, has continued over Skype/Zoom and by phone.

The quarterly Gazette is compiled, written, produced and sent out to around 250 members – as an email, audio file; or posted as hard copy, in cassette form and as Braille copies.

The website has been updated and improved, with further enhancements to come. NB – design is fully accessible to blind/VI people.

Feedback from blind/VI members (received since summer 2020).

In response to an article in the February 2021 Gazette: “I also have to agree that the BCA has been extremely welcoming to me personally and I continue to have the opportunity to learn, develop my thought processes, and to meet new folks and to socialize. A bit of everything for me and I shall always be grateful for all of my experiences. I would like to express my deep gratitude to MK for having been my committed chess coach and mentor over the past two years. I will also share that my experiences with the BCA have encouraged me to embark on a new initiative as a sight loss coach. Thanks so much BCA! ”

Another member was delighted with his talking chess clock. An extract from his email of appreciation: “I consider the talking chess clock to be a very valuable asset to my game. It will give me even more confidence when playing in tournaments and competitive games.”

“Dear Sirs, I have been a member of braille chess since the 1990s, before my university studies, then professional career. I remember my Braille chess days fondly and received guidance at the time from [one of the chess coaches] which led me to study law and qualify as a solicitor. I would very much like to send a thank you letter/card to...”.

Part of a thank you email after Tessler 2020: “The event has been absolutely great, I have made so many new friends.”

A message on behalf of 3 players in the remote autumn event: “thank you for organizing such a lovely tournament”

Re the autumn event: “May I say a very big "thank you" to the three of you for organising and controlling the tournament and keeping everyone informed all the way through. From my perspective as one of the participants, it went very well and I certainly enjoyed it and found the new way of holding a tournament very interesting. I'm sure it was a lot of work for you all, with such a diverse group of players and formats of play.”

After the autumn event: “I would like to thank everybody for a fantastic weekend. A special thanks goes to G W for enduring the Halloween gambit yesterday. I have been waiting to play that for the last five years! My thanks also go to Gill for her organisational skills and to Gerry and Julie for their brilliant efforts in keeping the games flowing and reporting the results. Well done!”

From Stan, a long-standing member, after the autumn event: “A great weekend! Thanks to Gill, the inspiration for this event. Thanks to Gerry and Julie 'the A team' for running the event and keeping us informed. Thanks to everyone who made it so enjoyable. A real success!”



Contribution to Women's Chess

Lawrence Cooper (2 nominations)

Nominated by Chris Fegan

Lawrence has always had an interest in helping women and girls with their chess careers dating back to when he first became a 4NCL captain in 1995. Since then, his teams have been notable for including many more than the minimum requirement of one female per team!

He co-organised the Wroxham International in 2002 which had five male and five female players and organised and funded ten player women events at the London Chess Classic from 2009-2013 as well as one alongside Sean Hewitt's e2e4 events in 2010. He was lucky enough to be captain and coach of the Welsh women's team at the 2016 Olympiad where the three youngest players gained their WCM titles. He captained teams in the 2015 & 2016 European Cup Cup for Women and four teams in the 2020 European Online Women's Club Cup. He captained the winning team in the very first women's 4NCL in 2019.

Once over the board chess ground to a halt in March 2020 due to covid-19 his attention switched to online chess. Being inspired by Jovanka Houska's Lichess England Women's team which has around 270 players. A typical week for him involves the team taking part in four team battles (two on Sunday, one on Tuesday and one on Thursday). He needs to ensure that the team is registered into each event and then publicise the event to players on LiChess, Facebook and via e-mail circulation. He also organises individual team arenas, this used to be every day of the week when we didn't have a team battle but as lockdown easing is gathering pace these are now less frequent and are often organised when we have a monthly or special event coming up. These have included a blitz match against the Philippines, a team battle hosted by England against other countries, monthly Nations Cup events along with the twice weekly Quarantane-Liga that we have taken part in since last summer.

Nominated by Alex Holowczak

He has run the England Women team on Lichess for a year, involving training tournaments, team battles, and much more. They've played maybe 100+ of these, of which only the most recent can be seen here on the right hand side: <https://lichess.org/team/england-women/tournaments>



Contribution to Online Chess

Oliver Brennan (2 nominations)

Nominated by Peter Catt;

I would like to nominate **Oliver Brennan**, from Rotherham Chess Club, for the ECF Contribution to Online Chess Award.

When the country was hit by the Covid pandemic all OTB chess in South Yorkshire ground to a halt like the rest of Britain, in March last year.

Oliver, who is an IT specialist, immediately set up Rotherham Online using the Lichess platform to enable local players to continue to play the game.

He had modest ambitions and was hoping initially to attract about a dozen members.

But 39 players entered the first Championship in April - a six round tournament over six weeks with a 30mins+30secs increment per move time limit per game.

Competitors had a week to arrange their game for each round at a mutually agreed time and date.

Since then participation in the tournaments has snowballed.

Rotherham Online currently has over 80 members, and more than 150 players from all over the country (mostly Yorkshire) have taken part in Oliver's tournaments at various times.

In addition to the regular six rounds Championships, there have been evening blitz and rapid tournaments, a one day Congress and a recent 8-rounds Rapid tournament (15mins+10secs increment, one game per week) that attracted over 60 entries.

It was won by a very strong Malaysian student from Sheffield University, who had played the odd game in previous tournaments on his laptop while back home and travelling on a bus!

Several other strong players have taken part in the tournaments including Oskar Hackner, who has represented England in the World Youth championships, and top British blind player Chris Ross, from Northampton.

At the other end of the scale there have been players graded under 100 ECF, and divisional tournaments were introduced - Premier, Major, Intermediate and Minor - to cater for players of all abilities.

The age range of participants also varies from almost 80 to a promising 10-year-old.

It has also attracted players whose only previous experience has been online tournaments and some complete beginners to competitive chess.

Several of these have expressed a desire to play OTB league chess in future when things hopefully return to normal.

Many of the players, like myself, were fairly new to online chess and some had difficulty navigating the system to register for tournaments.

But Oliver has always been incredibly patient and helpful in assisting them to become more confident users of the system, which he has made many improvements to over time.

He also adapted the Slack workplace system to enable players to communicate with each other and arrange games.

This has proved invaluable for some, not just in chess terms, and enabled them to chat to each other during periods of isolation.

Players who have been ill and retired from OTB chess have also taken part and one mentioned to me recently that he had enjoyed watching some of the games as much as playing.

For all these reasons and more I would like to nominate Oliver for keeping the game alive for so many people during such a difficult time.

I believe he has completely fulfilled the award criteria in terms of developing the content and services for online players by making it easier for them to challenge and accept challenges for matches.

If you click on the link at the end of my submission you will see how participants can check on fixtures and results with up-to-date tables of all competitions.

There is a Fair Play pledge which players must sign up to before entering competitions and Oliver has a couple of helpers when it comes to settling disputes and ensuring any attempts at cheating are monitored and dealt with.

Oliver has also made it easy for other players to watch the games and has continually developed and improved the website.

Please check out this link...<https://lichess.org/team/rotherham-online-championship>

Nominated by Daniel Sturman

When it became clear a lockdown was inevitable back in 2020, he quickly moved to create a structure/platform (using a combination of Slack and Lichess) to run events online. The competition he started back in April 2020 has grown and grown and is still going strong now. I don't know the full stats off the top of my head but i believe close to 200 players have been active in the tournaments he has put on. Initially it was an open classical event but has grown to be rapid and classical offerings, as well as open and divisional sections, and at its height there were over 50 tournament games per week across all the formats.

As well as doing all the amazing development work to ensure the events are as smoothly run as possible, Oli has been on hand pretty much 24/7 throughout to help people with any issues they may have with the technology, organising their games etc. I know you too have played in these tournaments so can also testify what wonderful events they are. I believe what Oli has done certainly falls into the following categories:

Online Chess contribution of the year (will be interpreted widely)

- Developing new and innovative content and services for online players
- Establishing and running online events and platforms
- Building and maintaining the chess community during the pandemic
- Attracting and supporting New to Chess and 'Queens Gambit' players



Contribution to Junior Chess

Uxbridge Junior Chess Club

Nominated by Oliver Knight

I am delighted to say that the Uxbridge Junior Chess Club has grown from a very small beginning just three years ago, to become a large, fun and friendly all-inclusive place to learn and enjoy the beautiful game. We now have OVER 80 juniors who are regularly involved with the club, attending our lessons, and playing for league teams.

We have regularly fielded 6 junior teams, including one all girls team, in the excellent Junior 4NCL competition, with many of the best Juniors also playing league matches for the senior teams.

During the original lockdown Nigel Colter (Uxbridge), Roger Lancaster (Watford) and I decided to take the initiative and create an online league for clubs in nearby counties. This is a competitive London-based league that has grown considerably over the last year (3 online 'seasons'). Thanks, are also due to Nigel Smith (Maidenhead) who joined the board.

In this Five Counties Online League (FCOL) we have six junior teams, 36 juniors playing every fortnight. The main purpose of the league is to give Juniors the chance to play Classic chess (45 mins plus 15 seconds increment) against various other Junior (and some senior) teams in Greater London & the surrounding areas.

We are now lucky to have 16 great Junior teams competing in the FCOL from Uxbridge, St Albans, Watford, Surbiton, Hampton Hill, Petts Wood & Orpington, Maidenhead, and Maidstone. This is giving Juniors ECF-graded quality matches, and great chances for us to analyse their classical matches with them to strengthen their games.

The FCOL is also encouraging the process of making friendships between the clubs, team managers and is basically linking up these Junior setups in a friendly league environment. We expect the FCOL to continue after Lockdown, giving Juniors who are too young or not able to travel to evening matches the chance to experience competitive, controlled League chess.



Coach David Okike going through one of the many exciting games played by GM Daniil Dubov.

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

Monday

Online group lessons every week run by CM David Okike, FM Rishpal
Starters, Beginners Advanced, Intermediate and Advance lessons. With a lesson, followed by a group tournament.

Tuesday

5COL and 4NCL online leagues

Wednesday

Over the Board session for selected players, with option to stay on to play senior club members in a controlled environment.
Online club night lichess Arena

Thursday

Hillingdon Online Swiss

Friday

Over the Board lessons at the Lady of Lourdes Church Hall, Uxbridge with chess lesson/demonstration followed by ECF graded Rapid League matches.
With a free chess Books and a free DVDs library for the children to borrow.



David Okike taking class with our Intermediate, Advanced Juniors supported by Ron.

We aim to encourage chess development, helping the children achieve their success to the best of our abilities in a friendly environment.

What would a club be without their Juniors, future stars in the making!



Junior first team captain **ECF Chess Maestro Dhairye Gauri** being presented his League winner award by coach Ron Foale, Daniel Knight

"I am Dhairye Gauri, the captain of the A-team and the longest-serving member of the Uxbridge Junior Chess Club (UJCC). UJCC is a fantastic place, which gives ample opportunities to the young chess players to play with other members of the same age with varying abilities. There are also several occasions where the club hosts tournaments and team matches in competitive chess leagues. Weekly lessons are conducted under the able guidance of extremely talented coaches including FM Rishpal Singh and CM David Okike. All other coaches like Daniel Knight, David Knight, Peter Walters, and Richard Smith are equally supportive. The chess sessions and the lessons are very economical, offered at £5 an hour. All the chess lessons are truly informative and helpful. My chess ability has massively improved after joining UJCC. Due to the current pandemic, Uxbridge Junior Chess Club provides online chess, with easy access to sessions and tournaments on lichess.org and lessons using Zoom.

I am highly passionate about chess! The reason why I love it so much is that every match is unique. Chess enables you to learn useful skills in life like planning or thinking tactically. My best match for the club was incredibly a game we lost to our senior A team in the Five Counties Online League. Although we lost terribly; none of us was upset as we did what we could and playing against better players improved our game. We analysed our games as a group after to hear a different perspective of playing the game. I enjoy being the captain of the A-team as I get to help my teammates in a different way from how coaches do just by being a similar age. This builds a special bond between the team, which is very important in a team sport."

Another one of our promising young stars in the making **Varish Tarigopula** recently made 1st place U12 OTB Junior Tournament in Oxford hosted by Joseph Conlon, is great that normal life seems to be coming back, hopefully here to stay.



On Dec 12th we hosted Queens Gambit Simul vs FM Sarah Longson (Female only event)
Which was open to all clubs
<https://youtu.be/X498x4iS4JQ>

With one of our female stars Zoe Knight holding an interview with Sarah before the match Simul started
<https://youtu.be/CVXYvMHd5hA>

We regularly hold Team battles vs various clubs, with our nearest neighbour Harrow run by Nevil Chan one of our favourites sparring partners. With as many as 27 to 35 Juniors on each side competing in this event. Harrow, being a lot older and more established, used to comfortably win the event but after much learning and improvement by our juniors it has become a remarkably close affair.

Vs Wimbledon (Managed by Gordon) Vs Lewisham (MB Andrew) etc....

Our Juniors also had a great time playing in our online Simul (23 of them) against experienced Women International Master, commentator and author [Natasha Regan](#). CM [David Okike](#) provided the excellent commentary

Here are photos of those juniors who managed to get a result against Natasha and the fantastic, signed chess books they won, written by [Natasha Regan](#) and Matthew Sadler, as a prize.



In order: Anish R Aurangabadkar, Zoe Knight, Advay Bhat

The children's list would be too long, so here are a selected group of promising players who will become better known in the years ahead if they continue their current improvement:

Rahul Babu, Suyash Prasad, Prathik Karthisamy, Rohan Shah, Varish Tarigopula, Dhairye Gauri, Samuel Knight, Rahul Shah, Jai Aggarwal, Gesneria Cepoi, Jeshan Jebananthan, Advay Bhat, Pranav Mangalagiri, Shaurya Kumar and Devansh Kapoor.

We would also like to thank our marvellous coaches who give up many hours of their free time to help support the club's progression:

David Okike, Rishpal Singh, Peter Walters, Colin Hughes, David Knight, Ron Foale, Richard Smith, Daniel Brooks

Website:<https://www.uxbridgejuniorchessclub.com/>

Facebook:<https://www.facebook.com/groups/972143632973605>

"The mere fact that the junior club has grown so big in such a short period of time is marvellous. With a lot of tutoring and encouragement from the matches and simuls. I could add that this could be a model for other communities to start a junior club from scratch. This has to be a UK success story to have 83 children registered in only 3 years."

CM David Okike



Club of the Year

Camberley Chess Club

Nominated by Steve Harley



Camberley Chess Club

Camberley Chess Club was re-formed in 1972 (it had previously existed in the 1930s and then disbanded). A friendly club of around 20 senior, adult and junior members has had an online presence as <https://camberleychess.co.uk/> since 2002, but up until 2020, played only Over the Board (OTB) chess in the Berkshire League and in the Surrey Border Leagues.

[Lockdown starts, physical club meetings and matches stop](#)

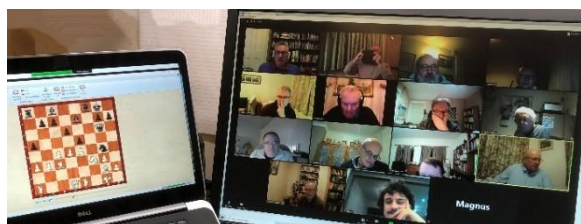
On March 16th, 2020, the committee advised all members that the club would not be meeting (in the usual sense) at all for the foreseeable future *and* our club secretary relocated to Northern Ireland! Gloomy predictions were made by some that we would not meet again for a significantly long time. Was this the end for our club? Would we get "our" venue back again? Would members return when OTB over the Board play resumed? Would the older members drift away never to be seen again?

There was a lot of uncertainty, and many clubs simply went into hibernation and even discussed disbanding. We decided we would not let this happen to Camberley Chess Club.

[Reinvigorating the club on Chess.com and Lichess.com](#)

Initially we updated our online presence and encouraged our members to join us on chess.com and lichess.com and also started promoting it to members and to our lapsed and past members some of whom had moved out of the area.

[First meeting on Zoom](#)



A game-changer milestone was reached on Tuesday, March 31st 2020 which heralded our first ever on-line meeting using Zoom technology seven days into the national lockdown. This meeting was

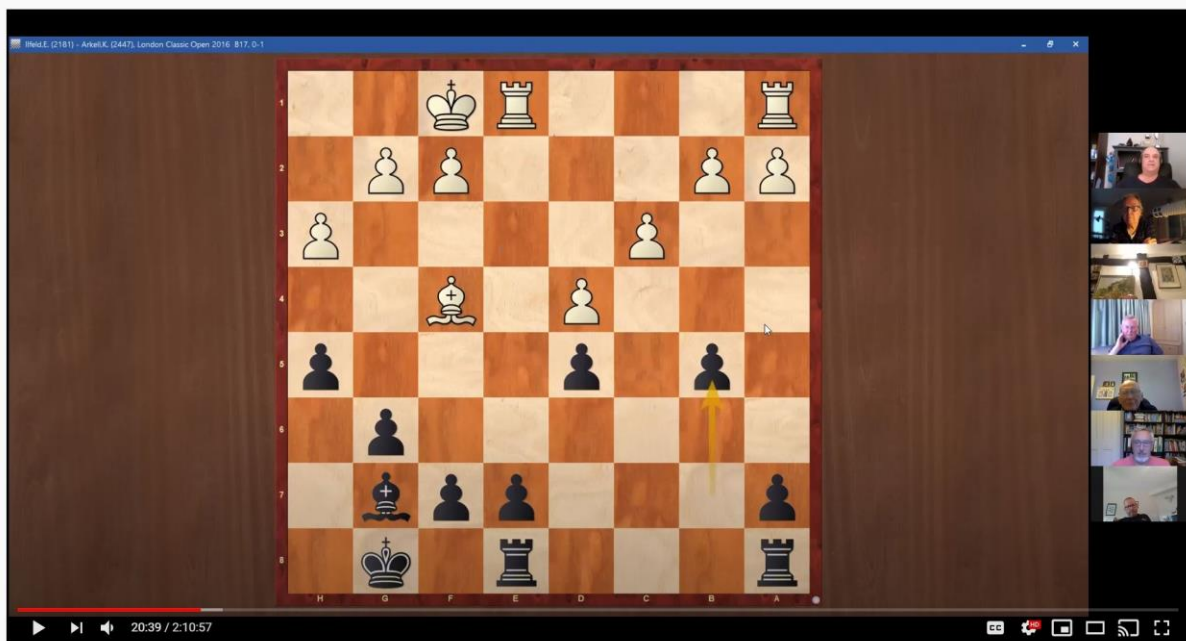
well received albeit by a small audience. Following that we scheduled a series of weekly meetings hosted by a different member and these continued to be internal meetings for members only. There was clearly an appetite from many of our members for sociable evenings of chess discussion, rather than just on-line matches which are well catered for elsewhere. Importantly members were willing, and very able, to contribute content to these meetings. Having said that some members simply did not want to participate in online activities for various reasons.

Online means Anywhere!

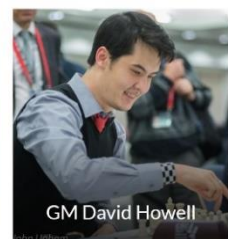
We realised that if we were not meeting in person, our members could be based anywhere. We could therefore help support our members and anyone else interested in chess, all remotely.

Invite Professional Guest speakers to our Zoom meetings

In June we "took a punt" (to hell with the cost!) and invited non-member GM Keith Arkell as our first external guest speaker.



Keith presentation about endings proved to be highly popular and successful, and was followed in subsequent weeks by talks from IM Andrew Martin, IM Cyrus Lakdawala (from California), SIM Clive Frostick, GM Michael Adams IM Nigel Povah and most recently, GM David Howell.



These guest speakers are funded from monies that previously had been allocated to fees for our physical club premises. We decided that there was little point holding these funds for an uncertain length of time and not using them for our members' benefit. It helped that our venue provider was kind enough to cease charging us rent but kept our booking on hold in perpetuity.

We found that a mix of expert presentations and casual club nights has worked well.

[YouTube videos of our significant meetings to catch up on](#)

All of our significant Zoom meetings were recorded, edited, "topped and tailed" and made available directly embedded on our website from the Club's newly created and branded YouTube Channel.

[Improvements in Website, Facebook and Twitter and online membership](#)

Following new blood revitalising the committee our social media footprint improved with regularly activity on Facebook, Twitter and our own superb WordPress web site which is now an excellent resource for members, potential members, and visitors.

The screenshot shows the Camberley Chess Club website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: Home, Membership, Events, Videos, News, Resources, Coaching, KR Tourn., Games, Juniors, Fixtures, Results, History, and Contact. Below the navigation bar is a main content area. On the left, there's a section titled "Camberley Chess Club meets online" with a sub-header "Camberley Chess Club meet Tuesdays 8PM on Zoom and Sundays 4PM on chess.com". It includes text about online meetings and a list of guest speakers with their photos: IM Cyrus Lakdawala, IM Andrew Martin, IM Nigel Povah, GM Michael Adams, and GM David Howell. Below this is a call to action for online membership. On the right, there's a sidebar with a section "Camberley Chess Club meets online" containing links to Zoom meetings, a link to join online, and a link to membership options. Below this is a section "Upcoming Events" listing a Sunday Arena 14 on Chess.com on June 20 at 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm BST.

We are particularly proud of our resources page with many links and videos of club members introducing and explaining their favourite chess websites sites, programs etc <https://camberleychess.co.uk/internet-chess-resources/>

We established regular tournaments for members on chess.com and also we played fun consultation matches with other clubs via Zoom.

The regular Zoom meetings were widely publicised (without spending any funds to market them) and we introduced the concept of an "online club membership" with a nominal £10 per annum fee, which

also helps fund talks Online members then received the Zoom meeting invitations directly each week. This has brought us an additional fifty or so new members of all ages from across the globe from such places as California, Nairobi, Gibraltar, Reykjavik, Spain, South Africa and Aberdeen as well as from England.

We also set up a Camberley Chess Club Stripe account to enable easy membership payments by credit card or Apple pay directly from our website to add to the traditional bank transfer method.

Online Tournaments

In October 2020 we promoted, organised and ran on Lichess an Open Rapidplay tournament (the Keith Richardson Memorial) which previously had run at our "normal" venue. This was linked with a Zoom meeting with expert commentary from club members

On Sunday afternoons we host a weekly 1-hour Arena tournament on Chess.com , which regularly attracts 8-15 members.

Adult Beginners

Interestingly a new phenomenon was developing as a consequence of our Zoom meetings (and helped by Queen's Gambit on Netflix) and it was this: new membership applications from adult beginners. Traditionally, many feel, English clubs have been poor in their response to this membership sector. Many clubs are not good at welcoming adults and children who cannot already play. We wanted to buck this trend and so we grasped this nettle by creating Zoom and web site content for them and linked them up with our club coaches (who welcomed the business!). We believe the adult beginner is a potential untapped market for English chess.

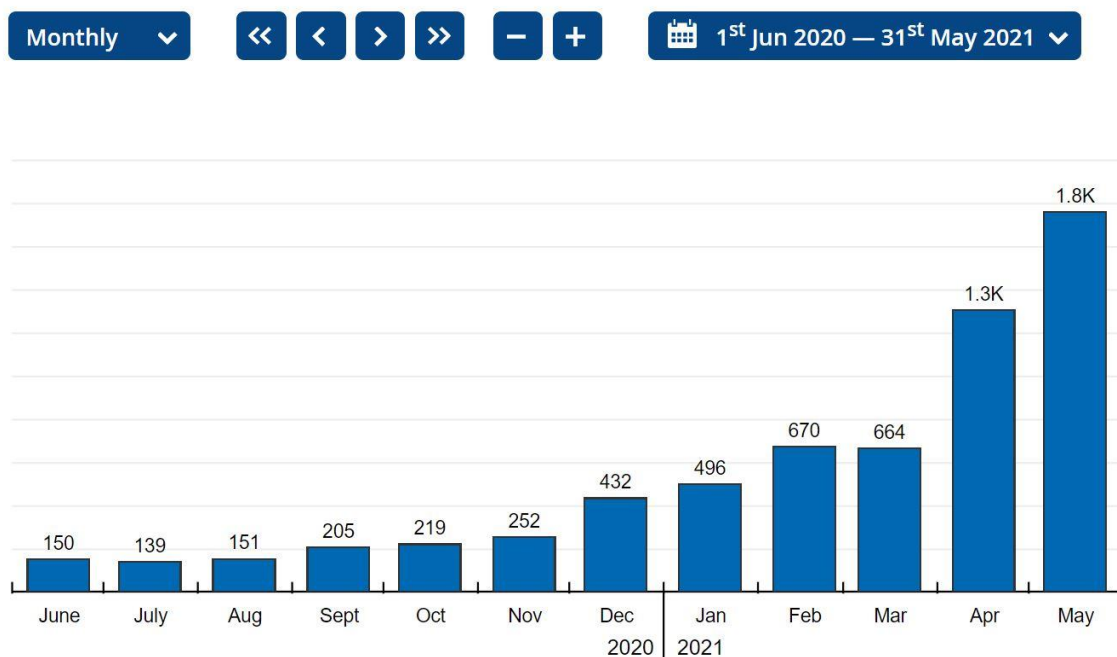
Many of these adult beginners were local to our normal venue but before lockdown had not been interested. They searched online, found our website and social media presence and made contact. In fact, several new members told us that they searched the UK for clubs with the best online activities, presence and resources and chose Camberley Chess Club.

We found that it is important (and not easy) to set online content at a level which understandable yet interesting for members of all abilities. It is very easy for the loudest and best players to dominate Zoom meetings, so good facilitation and slow enough coverage of positions is needed.

International Matches

2021 brought yet further innovation. We had the idea to challenge clubs in the same or similar time zone to us so that we could play them on a Tuesday evening. Our first match was against the Woodpushers Isle of Wight (!) which was followed by Bon Accord Aberdeen, and Nairobi. All of these were paired with a live Zoom meeting with expert commentary from club members.

Increased membership and online activities



Our website traffic has grown 10-fold in the last year to 1,800 unique visitors a month.

<input type="checkbox"/>			Public	None	19 May 2021 Published	345	1	100.0% 10 likes
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210511 Brush up your Endings skills with IM Nigel Poveh. We were delighted that Nigel Poveh from Quilford Chess Club joined us. Nigel is a very experienced International Master, Correspondence Grandmaster and respected author. He gave a lecture about...	Public	None	17 May 2021 Published	68	0	-
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210504 Camberley v Aberdeen Chess Club On Tuesday 4th May Camberley played Ban Accord Chess Club of Aberdeen in a friendly match on Chess.com. It was only our second online match, after the one against Isle of Wight in April. Camberley...	Public	None	6 May 2021 Published	21	0	-
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210420 Isle of Wight Chess Club v Camberley Chess Club On Tuesday 20th April a team of 6 from Camberley Chess Club played an online match versus Isle of Wight Chess Club on Chess.com. Each player had two games against the same opponent at a time limit...	Public	None	23 Apr 2021 Published	27	0	-
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210413 An Evening with GM Michael Adams We were excited to announce that Grandmaster Michael Adams will be our star guest. Michael is the long-time UK number 1, former world number 4, candidate finalist and has been British champion 7...	Public	None	14 Apr 2021 Published	441	1	100.0% 8 likes
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210406 The ancient game of Go an introduction by Mark Payne This week our talk will not be about chess! Instead, club member Mark Payne will introduce us to the ancient Chinese game of Go, which is renowned for being extremely profound and complex despite its...	Public	None	8 Apr 2021 Published	32	0	100.0% 1 like
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210323 Magnus Carlsen Invitational by Colin Lyne Camberley Chess Club meet online Tuesday evening. Details of how to join us are on our website https://camberleychess.co.uk/	Public	None	23 Mar 2021 Published	16	0	-
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210302 The Morra Gambit - A Free Pawn by Ken Coates Following on from our last session with Andrew Martin on various gambits, this week's meeting will feature a talk by Ken Coates from Crowther Chess Club about the Morra Gambit. This is an ambitious...	Public	None	3 Mar 2021 Published	34	0	100.0% 1 like
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210223 Gambit to Victory by IM Andrew Martin Gambit to Victory by IM Andrew Martin talking on a Camberley Chess Club Tuesday evening meeting. Details of how to join us are on our website https://camberleychess.co.uk/	Public	None	23 Feb 2021 Published	99	0	100.0% 2 likes
<input type="checkbox"/>		20210216 Some games from The Keith Richardson Tournament 2020 by Clive Frostick. Some games from The Keith Richardson Tournament 2020 by Clive Frostick. Camberley Chess Club meet online Tuesday evening. Details of how to join us are on our website https://camberleychess.co.uk/	Public	None	19 Feb 2021 Published	22	0	-

We have had 62 Zoom meetings with between 15 and 60 attendees. One YouTube video of our Michael Adams meeting got 441 views.

Tweet activity



Camberley Chess Club @CamberleyChess

On 18-May GM David Howell @DavidHowellGM will be our star guest. David is the UK #2, was the UK's youngest GM and has been British champion 3 times. He will talk us through some games and there will be a Q&A session. This event is free and open to all. <https://camberleychess.co.uk/event/an-evening-with-david-howell/> ...

Impressions	10,172
Total engagements	208
Detail expands	91
Link clicks	77
Profile clicks	22
Likes	14
Retweets	4

One Tweet about our David Howell meeting got over 10,000 impressions with 77 link clicks.

Our social media footprint has grown considerably during 2020-2021: The Facebook Group has around 60 members, Chess.com 49 members, Lichess.org has 40 members.

First OTB meetings begin again

June 2021 combined with the occasional bout of decent weather allowed us to start meeting physically at Pine Ridge Golf Club where we met many of our new members, whom we had only seen on Zoom, for the first time, as well as catching up with some old friends



OTB and Online complement each other

Camberley Chess Club intends to continue as a traditional OTB Chess Club, reinvigorated and strengthened by the new members we have attracted during lockdown, and with a continuing strong online UK and international presence. Lockdown presented an existential threat to the club, but it also presented opportunities which we seized, and we can now look forward to an exciting new chapter in the club's history.



Congress of the Year

Cheney Rapidplays

Nominated by Joseph Conlon

The Cheney Rapidplays have been a series of events that originated in October 2020 with the intent of allowing junior players the continued opportunity, as much as possible, to play overtheboard chess during the pandemic period. During the period 1st June 2020 to 31st May 2021 four such events took place (a planned January event was cancelled due to lockdown, and a fifth event has since taken place in June 2021). In total these have resulted in around 500 OTB games submitted for ECF rating, and starting in June 2021 the top section has also been submitted for FIDE rating. For the year covered by the award, these events have been almost the only open-entry (i.e. not closed club events) OTB tournaments to have taken place in England.

For verification, all results from the events are publicly available either via the ECF Rating site or results.utuswiss.co.uk, and also on cheneychess.com (set up by an attending parent). Here comparisons are made to the award criteria:

• Designing and running congresses and competitions during the pandemic (online, hybrid and OTB)

The event has been a pioneer in pointing out and using the category ('Supervised activities for children') that allowed OTB junior chess to take place under many of the Covid restrictions. The existence of this exemption was pointed out in public via ECF Forum and also privately to members of the ECF Board. In addition to the merely chess aspects, the event also developed Covid protocols and procedures that have been used by other events and have been fed into the ECF guidance on resumption of Over-the-Board chess. The event has also inspired others - for example, much of the format (using the same venue, building, equipment and protocols) has been borrowed to run two standard-play junior weekend events (in May and June 2021).

• Innovation in developing and establishing new formats

In contrast to normal junior Swiss events, the tournaments have run with players divided into all-play-all sections of 8 players. These are not just well adapted to the pandemic period (All-Play-Alls define a natural bubble; all pairings can be prepared in advance) but offer other advantages over regular Swisses. A disadvantage of junior Swisses is that in a typical 6-round Swiss, players might only get 2 games 'at their level'. This is particularly true for the strongest junior players, who often exit all-junior events as they fail to offer them worthwhile opposition.

The use of all-play-alls organised by strength means that every game is a good one. This benefits both the strongest players, who got the high-quality opposition they need to improve their chess, and also the weakest ones, who can have the pleasure and encouragement of winning plenty of games.

• Record of successful and well attended events

Many players have returned to multiple events illustrating that they are happy with the format and the opportunities. While capacities have been limited for Covid reasons and the need to maintain social distancing (originally 32, now expanded to 48), the events have filled up several weeks in advance.

- **Attracting a diverse player group to support the congress events**

For reasons of legality, all participants have been juniors. While the location in Oxford has meant most entries have come from either London or the South-East, there have also been a number of participants from the Midlands and some from Manchester. There has been a healthy number of girls entering, many of whom have played their first tournament here and then returned, and a couple of times a section has even had a majority of girls in it. The section names (which are chess-themed and change every 2 events) have also been chosen to encourage greater knowledge of interesting figures from chess history whom juniors and parents are unlikely to know about (e.g. Rhoda Bowles or Mir Sultan Khan).

- **Strength of the congress open section and ability to support players at all levels**

At the top end, the top section has seen participation from players at the very top of their age groups (who have won OTB British/London junior championships etc). For these strongest players, each event offers 7 OTB games against quality opposition. As tournaments with adults have been prohibited, by bringing such players together these tournaments have, in the last year, offered essentially the only chance for such players to play challenging OTB opposition (as well as to socialise outside with past/future teammates on England junior trips). The strength of the top section is easily seen by looking at the event results (e.g. on the ECF rating site).

There are many positive sides to online chess, but it can never replicate the many added dimensions to playing someone face-to-face; the experience of playing competitive OTB games is essential to junior development and these events have been almost the only ones offering this opportunity in the period covered by the award. The events have also allowed 'lockdown' players, who became significantly stronger from March 2020 onwards, to prove themselves over the board as genuine national standard players. Examples are Stanley Badacsonyi winning the top section with 6.5/7, Ayan Pradhan winning the second section despite only being 5, or Ruqayyah Rida who has also won the second section and so far gained 400 rating points (from 723E = the old 3E) to 1092 from these events. Operating all-play-alls, arranged by strength, with 3 trophies per section of 8 players, allows weaker players the chance to go home with a trophy. Children like bling, and this has been a particular encouragement to players who would never normally have the chance of winning trophies in conventional junior Swiss events. They are still absolutely delighted to go home with a shiny trophy, are encouraged to carry on with chess in a way not produced by getting 1/6, and feel no less sense of achievement for the trophy having been won in the bottom section.

- **Increasing numbers of players in all sections, demonstrating actions which have led to this increase**

The number of children attending has increased steadily from 13 in the original event in October 2020 to 42 in the May 2021 event (the June 2021 event, with a capacity of 48, filled up three weeks in advance). This has allowed an increase from a single section in October 2020 to 5 sections in May 2021 and 6 in June 2021.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT BY WADIH KHOURY

I would like to support the nomination of the Cheney Rapidplay events for Congress of the year. As a parent of a strong junior, my support is based on the following elements:

- The Cheney Rapidplay events kept Over the Board chess alive for juniors. It was heart-warming to see 30+ juniors smiling at the opportunity to play their favourite game. It kept their passion alive and offered them a very different experience than the online one that most chess players were limited to.
- It offered a great spread of ability, and challenge at all levels. By splitting the event into smaller all-play-all groups, it ensured that players got consistent games at around their skill levels. At the top end, you had a strong mix of British, UKCC and LJCC winners and runner-ups.

- Due to its location, it attracted players beyond the usual London / South East catchment area, and many juniors were happy to see some of their friends based in the Midlands.
- The event was such a success that it often ended oversubscribed, and it was easy to miss out on the tournament if not prompt at registering.
- Finally, these events help inspire other similar events, who recycled many of the good groundwork done by the Cheney Rapid event. An example is the Cheney Standardplay events that I organised: I would have never dared organise an event had I not witnessed the organisation of the Cheney Rapid events.

A great thanks to the organiser for kickstarting Over the Board in England when the outlook was grim. It was a great support for the juniors who had a rare opportunity to have fun and develop their skills.