

David Jones 1923-2023

Ten years ago to the day, I stood up in this room and wished David a happy 90th birthday.

When we had all raised our glasses and toasted him, I said, "We'll see you at the 100th, David!"

Well, ladies and gentlemen, until the 18th of May of this year, David was all set to keep that date.

And how good he was at keeping those dates. As he advanced into his 10th decade, he continued to turn out reliably for the Cup team, and deliver the points at the board. Even as he closed in on his 11th decade, he was online every week and testing his old team-mate Vivian Woodward, who I'm glad is with us tonight. There was a whimsical smile on his face 10 years ago at the thought of returning today for another party, but my goodness he so nearly made it.

David captained the O & C's chess team for 16 years, from 1992-2008. I would need to be captain for another 7 years to pass that record. As far as we know, the O & C only formed a chess team in 1982, and so no-one else can be anywhere near David's length of tenure.

David was the face of O & C chess when I joined the Club in 1993, alongside chess secretary Stuart White, who I'm pleased is with us tonight. He had only recently retired, and was going about the task of organising the team and competing on his board with energy and relish. I had been a "180" strength player at university (about 2050 on the Elo rating scale) and he was delighted to have someone of that strength to play board 2 behind the Club's established top board, Terry Chapman, who is also here with us tonight. This desire to see the Club's team do well continued long after he ceased to be captain: only last season, he wrote to me to say how pleased he was to see someone of the calibre of Andrew Rogozinski – also here with us tonight – had started playing for us.

And we have done well. When I first took over the captaincy in 2010, I was taking over a team that had won the Hamilton-Russell Cup no less than 6 times under David's tenure, albeit not since 2002. I was delighted to be able to bring to an end that barren stretch in my first season, just as I had brought an end to a run of 8 Oxford victories in the Varsity match 22 years earlier. David had a great record for us in that Cup-winning season (+3 =2 -1) only bettered by Vivian Woodward and myself. We had to wait another 9 years for our next success, under Nigel White's capable captaincy, and David was able to share in this success too, winning a friendly board against the Reform in a match played online during the pandemic which clinched outright first place for the O & C.

David's determination to focus upon the chess did ruffle a few feathers with visiting teams. I recall that in the early years, the Club's culinary hospitality extended to a plateful of sandwiches at half-time in the games. This contributed to the view expressed to me by Michael Yeoh of the Hurlingham that the O & C was "great for chess, terrible for food." David firmly believed that a convivial evening could be built around chess, with elaborate meals eating into the time available for play and post mortem analysis, and although I hope that you have all enjoyed tonight's meal, I do have some sympathy for his point of view.

David has his place in the chapter on "Notable Cup Players" in Danny Rosenbaum's and Norman Britten's book "The Hamilton-Russell Cup – 100 Years of Convivial Chess and the Man behind it" published this year. The authors have kindly included my photo of David cutting his 90th birthday cake topped with a chessboard and pieces made for him by his family. I am sure you, Katharine, and Felicity, would have made him something equally splendid to mark tonight.

I'm glad Peter Lee from the Athenaeum is here tonight with us after another battle at the board with Terry Chapman. I can remember David at one of my earliest matches for the Club informing Terry that

his “usual opponent” awaited him on board 1. Theirs must be one of the most enduring rivalries in the Hamilton-Russell Cup competition, and I am sure their encounter would have brought back fond memories for David tonight. I had hoped that the billing would be “1965 British Champion versus reigning World over-65 Champion”, but sadly Terry lost his way when leading the tournament and winning against German grandmaster Rainer Knaak and fell tantalisingly short.

10 years ago tonight we marked David’s 90th birthday with a match against the RAC. We promoted David to Board 1 and paired him with Henry Mutkin, who I am delighted to say is also with us tonight. Their rivalry at the board goes back to the 1950s, and I am sure that you Henry would have loved to extend it further tonight.

Richard Hall has joined us tonight from the Reform Club. I believe that he is our one grandmaster in the room tonight, at correspondence chess. His Club played the very first match in the Hamilton-Russell Cup on 8th November 1923 – just 10 days before David was born – and played us 10 days ago on the centenary of that match. David would be pleased to know that we won, but less pleased that we defaulted a board because one of our players did not put the match in his diary.

We had originally planned today as a match between the O & C and a combined team of members of the other London Clubs League clubs who had known David. I promised David that we would make today happen whether he could make it in person or not, and he could either join us via Zoom or look down benevolently upon us from the great chessboard in the sky. When David sadly passed away 6 months ago, though, it looked like tonight would be a small intimate gathering.

Then along came Robert Lipscomb here, and issued a challenge on behalf of le Cercle to a match on David’s 100th birthday. All at once, we had lots of opponents for a potential O & C team. Mesdames et messieurs, nous vous savons gré de nous avoir lancé ce défi. And thank you to everyone on the O & C team for accepting this challenge.

Katharine has confirmed my vague recollection that David worked in Paris towards the end of his career, at the International Energy Agency in fact from 1982-88. Donc je suis certain que David aurait accueilli nos amis parisiens à Londres pour ce match avec beaucoup de plaisir. We look forward very much to a return match in Paris with you before too long.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I give you David Le Brun Jones. He played chess for Oxford in the Varsity Match in 1942, 1946 and 1947, and joined the codebreakers at Bletchley Park to crack Japanese codes in between. He was admitted to membership of one of the O & C’s constituent clubs in 1956, and I am told by the Secretary’s office remains a member to this day, as the Club failed to find his records until we advised them of his middle name and membership number yesterday. As David’s civil service and O & C chess team-mate the late Peter Gant might have reflected, in spite of all temptation to belong to another nation, David remains a member of the O & C. So please raise a glass with me to a man who if not present with us in person, still lives on in our hearts and memories. To David Jones!

Peter Webster, 18/11/23







