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British Chess Literature to 1914: A Handbook for Historians

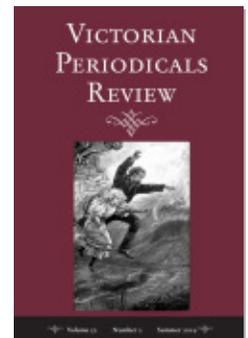
by Tim Harding (review)

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Victorian Periodicals Review, Volume 52, Number 2, Summer 2019, pp. 428-430
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/vpr.2019.0026>



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from serious debate concerning women and marriage in the story “According to Meredith,” which functions as a rejoinder to George Meredith’s proposal of ten-year temporary marriage contracts as an alternative to a permanent arrangement. The female protagonist of the story declares, “I long for the moment of release, for the moment when I shall at last have the right to forget, as much as such things can ever be forgotten, these ten years of my life” (36). Though Lowndes’s stories deeply engage women and the nature of the feminine, they also challenge conventional notions of masculinity; Lowndes is particularly sympathetic towards men with stereotypically feminine traits. This collection provides rich pickings for researchers interested in the woman question, gender, and masculinities.

Lowndes’s stories, along with Warkentin’s commentaries, will appeal to scholars concerned with how Victorian styles and themes are manifested and transformed in early twentieth-century short fiction. Furthermore, the compilation also marks a decisive turn in the revival of an author who can, thankfully, no longer be called the subject of scholarly neglect.

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Tim Harding, *British Chess Literature to 1914: A Handbook for Historians* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018), pp. i + 399, \$49.95 paperback.

Tim Harding’s *British Chess Literature to 1914: A Handbook for Historians* coincides with increased interest in sport history and its intersections with print and urban networks. Focusing on chess literature published in Britain and Ireland from the 1810s to 1914, the work addresses an audience of researchers and chess enthusiasts seeking insight into the game’s literary entanglements. Harding discusses chess columns in the first four chapters, and a valuable appendix summarises all such columns published in the period. Later chapters examine chess magazines, periodicals, books, and archival information, and further appendices correct standard reference works on chess. *British Chess Literature to 1914* extends the author’s recent research, which includes the monograph *Joseph Henry Blackburne* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015) and an intriguing collection of capsule biographies entitled *Eminent Victorian Chess Players* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

Harding weaves material on chess-play with contextual knowledge of the larger landscape of publishing and transmission of information throughout the book. He identifies Egerton Smith and Thomas Wakley, editors of chess columns in the *Lancet*, *Kaleidoscope*, and *Liverpool Mercury*, as pioneers

in the early 1810s when “there was very little public chess activity at all” and sporadic press coverage (17). From this period of scarcity, Harding describes a rising wave of chess material shaped by publishing trends and catalysed by George Walker and Howard Staunton, who “laid the foundations for the chess column as an institution in newspapers” (25). By the mid-Victorian period, discussed in chapter three, much of chess’s cultural identity as a respectable, rational recreation was (seemingly) settled. Chess travelled around the country in print: columns appeared in almost every major city and most towns as newspapers began publishing more frequently after the abolition of taxes on the press. By the 1850s, “the chess column in the *Illustrated London News* was being read by 20,000 people weekly” (31). Women represented a good number of this audience, and chess columns appeared “aimed at youth from 1860 onwards,” suggesting chess’s perceived moral utility (31, 40). Subsequent chapters examine the latter years of the chess column, the turbulent industry of chess magazines, and a range of chess books published in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. During this time, further changes in the newspaper industry, tensions between amateur and professional players, and transformations in leisure and urban environments resulted in diminishing attention paid to—or at least a declining reputation of—the game within printed material.

British Chess Literature to 1914 is logically organised by media type, analysing newspapers, periodicals, magazines, and books. This is important when considering the varied networks of publication, transmission, audience, and reception of printed material. Harding has conducted an impressive amount of research, examining material held at the British National Archives, the Bodleian Library, and the John G. White Collection at Cleveland Public Library, amongst many other repositories. A final chapter provides useful advice in an anecdotal but engaging manner to researchers visiting these libraries. In revisiting the archives, Harding has corrected numerous errors perpetrated and perpetuated within the literature. These errors have also spread to non-specialist texts, as Harding demonstrates with a particularly egregious example from the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for the aforementioned George Walker. This corrective aspect is welcome.

British Chess Literature to 1914 does not engage with theoretical or methodological debates in a substantive manner. While such ambitions are not the aim of the book, which relies on empirical research, this absence signals the primary gap in research on chess: if the topic is to evolve outside of specialist publishers and self-contained journals, scholars need to politicise chess-play and more critically examine its place within wider culture. A fresh approach might recognise alternative theoretical methods or advances in the disciplines of social and cultural history, such as those surrounding respectability. Although these concerns may be outside the scope

of the author's interests, they could aid in lines of research identified in chapter eight. Digital humanities methodologies, for example, could assist with the long-standing problem of identifying "the early chess clubs and associations in Britain," particularly in assessing and visualising the quantity and geographical spread of these institutions (294).

Principal reference works on the topic remain: Richard Eales's *Chess: The History of a Game* (London: Batsford, 1985), Douglas A. Betts's *Chess: An Annotated Bibliography of Works Published in the English Language 1850–1968* (Olomouc: Moravian Chess, 2005), David Hooper and Ken Whyld's *The Oxford Companion to Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Gino Di Felice's *Chess Periodicals: An Annotated International Bibliography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), Ken Whyld's *Chess Columns: A List* (Olomouc: Moravian Chess, 2002), and Ken Whyld and Chris Ravilious's *Chess Texts in the English Language, Printed before 1850: An Annotated Bibliography* (Olomouc: Moravian Chess, 2002). However, all have errors, problems, or omissions. For example, Harding notes that Betts's bibliography "does need to be supplemented by information in some library catalogs," whilst "the treatment of early English-language chess magazines is deficient" in Di Felice's work (15, 16). Nevertheless, these reference works have not been supplanted. Rather, armed with *British Chess Literature to 1914*, one can better prepare one's research path and use these other works more efficiently.

This well-written and well-researched book will be valuable to those starting out in the field of chess history as well as more experienced researchers within sport and leisure history and periodical studies. Harding organises a large body of material into approachable units, gives a competent overview of the whole period under review, and encourages future research. He provides important information on the physical archives of chess within libraries and the main digitised collections. The book's strength is its focused scope; its limitations are of design. *British Chess Literature to 1914* is a welcome addition to the literature concerning chess's history and to common-sense methodological approaches to periodical studies.

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