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INTRODUCTION

As many of you know, I have a collection of about 1000 chess books and am particularly interested in chess books on the history of the game and on teaching young players. To that end, I will be starting to put up reviews sometime in the next few weeks/months. If anyone is interested in writing a review for the site, please let me know.

BRITISH CHESS LITERATURE TO 1914: A HANDBOOK FOR HISTORIANS BY TIM HARDING

34960
Tim Harding's new book British Chess Literature to 1914: A Handbook for Historians highlights noted chess columns, magazines, and even books from before the First World War. As a handbook, it strives to be not only a research tool, but also to serve as an example of how one historian works. The end date of 1914 is chosen because 'the outbreak of the first World War, after which there are significant technological and cultural changes.

Harding breaks the literature into three distinct types:

- 1) chess columns in non-chess publications – both magazine and newspaper
- 2) chess magazines
- 3) chess books

Harding points out that chess notation gives chess games a unique advantage in the press, since every action can be explained in detail. Harding opens with coverage of the founder of the *Liverpool Mercury* and first chess column editor, Egerton Smith, in 1813. He jumps to the more famous: George Walker, first to establish a long-running column of games and news and Howard Staunton, who becomes chess editor of the *Illustrated London News* in 1845. He then moves into the chess column "Golden Age" from 1860 to 1885. Harding highlights the most well-known columns, usually those written by the strongest players, such as William Steinitz and Henry Bird. Bird stands out because his columns could easily be tailored to any paper and became the first syndicated column. The columns after the "Golden Age" have a steep increase in their syndication levels and variety declined as adept, well-known columnists such as Leopold Hoffer and Amos Burn became more widely distributed.

The magazine section has two chapters, with one on magazines in general and the other focusing on The Chess Player's Chronicle, even though the events in both chapters happen concurrently. The Philidorian, is covered in some detail as it is the first chess magazine in the English language, though not the first over-all. Many of the magazines are mentioned briefly because they were small runs that likely never made a profit. As an example of the long, convoluted, and "extremely complicated" history of a more prominent magazine, Harding uses the Chess Player's Chronicle from 1863 as a case study. He shows how a magazine could evolve over time with an editor and as editors changed the magazine could, and often did, change substantially in tone and material.

The third section (Chapter 7) focuses on British chess books, starting back with the earliest works at the end of the fifteenth century. He quickly moves to the era of Philidor in the eighteenth century and the initial philosophical development of using strategy. Building on this foundation, Sarratt and Cochrane's *Treatises* target more advanced players and strategy development. The trend of more in-depth study continued to build in to the nineteenth century with game collections, opening manuals, books of problems to solve, and study texts. Interestingly, Harding argues correctly, that "old chess books are principally of value for what they can tell us about the mentalities of the past, rather than for what they can tell us about the game itself." (p. 231) While undoubtedly true, he fails to mention the value of many of these games for entertainment and usefulness as teaching tools for beginners.

The final chapter, "On Doing Chess History Today", is certainly appropriate for this book but probably could also appear in various McFarland monographs. For a chess historian not focused on British history, it might be the best chapter of the book. It's entertaining to read and has a wealth of information on the many tasks of a historian, like working in databases

and visiting major chess collections in libraries, such as the White Collection in Cleveland, Ohio. It is unfortunate, though understandable, that there is not more material on the major non-English speaking library collections, such as those at the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in the Netherlands.

As with most McFarland publications, there is an ample set of Appendices. The first, and by far the most significant one, is the annotated list of British and Irish Chess columns to 1914 that is based largely off Whyld's research. It sets out to correct various errors and expand on Whyld's work. The other appendices are primarily short lists of corrections/amendments for such books as Jeremy Gaige's *Chess Personalia*. The additional back matter, such as the indexes are standard in quality and content.

Research guides typically provide little of interest to a reader not focused on the specific field. In this case, Harding not only provides a detailed research guide but also a resource that has value across many sub-genres within chess history and is enjoyable to read, especially chapter eight. For these reasons, it can be highly recommended for researchers across many chess history sub-fields.

This book can be purchased on line at www.mcfarlandpub.com (<http://www.mcfarlandpub.com/>) or by calling 800-253-2187.