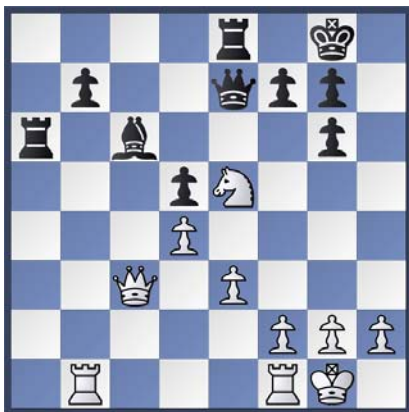


Witney 1 – City 1
21 March 2011

As the 2010-11 season draws to a climax, the question of whether things would end with a bang or a whimper had been largely decided a few weeks earlier when City dropped a point against Cowley 2 – but a win tonight would still leave them with an outside chance of Witney tripping themselves up in their last match (v Cowley 1, April 3).

The teams lined up much as before, the only absentee being Peter Wells, who was away in France at the [European Individuals](#), his reward for getting there being a plum tie in Round 1 against a player rated 1750... but the prospect of relentlessly strong opposition in future in a competition with 220+ titled players. Peter's absence meant that all lower board preparation from the visitors went out the window [although in fairness my own prep never came in from the cold...] – and six boards went out to show what they'd learned from the GM's opening preparation lecture series the previous month – and it seemed that 5 out of six boards whose owners expressed a preference was playing off-beat lines.



Truran – Tan
White to move

The one exception was **Board 2**, which saw a quick draw agreed in Truran – Tan, after a queens gambit exchange variation with moves rapidly rolled out by both sides, the familiar outlines of a queen-side minority attack were taking shape and became entrenched from the diagram position after **21. Nxc6 bxc6, 22. Rfc1**, with White holding a theoretical, or perhaps technical advantage in the shape of the backward c-pawn, but the prospect of a long grind to try to exploit it. In many ways this is similar to the [Symphony of Heavenly Length](#) (Evans – Opsahl, 1951) – although the recently deceased GM had the benefit of a roving knight for the exploitation of his advantage when at Dubrovnik – so the melodies on this board were compressed into the more compact musical form that is the sound of one-hand clapping another...

½ apiece

On **Board 5**, Mike Marlow had negotiated the 3. Bb5 Sicilian to a point where, at move 18, a draw was agreed – an unusual early draw involving Dave, which suggests that White has the better of things... - in fact, White's is the more compact position, and it's not easy to suggest a continuation for Black that doesn't commit his king to some pressure. An ordinary freeing continuation like 18 ... d5 runs into 19. exd6 Bxd6; 20. f5! – when it's tactically possible at present to recapture on f5 with the rook if required

1-1

So, two draws in the bag, and with the visitors looking materially better and positionally comfortable on top and bottom boards, it was time to look at the centre boards, where the home players were nursing advantages of a contrasting nature. On **Board 4**,

Mark Hannon had more space after a double-fianchetto opening morphed into a Kings Indian attack of sorts; board 3 seemed promised a lot more violence:



Marlow – Hackett
Black to move, draw agreed



Manley – Headlong
White to move

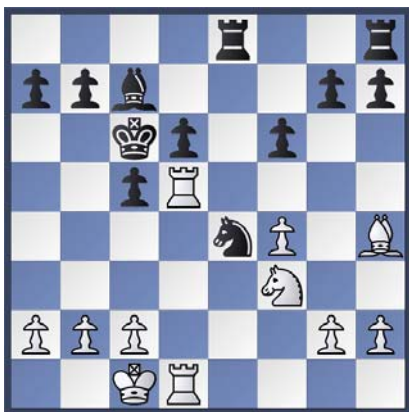
castling privilege should prove fatal – but after an exchange of queens on move 19 the life and drama ebbed away and a handshake was in evidence by move 25. A lucky escape for City...

1 ½ - each



Hannon – Scott
White to move

38.Kg1 Rc1+ ½-½



Gentry – Terry
Black to move

Unusually, the same opening on boards 3 and 5, with completely different treatments – after Black's ... Nd4 in the Sicilian, Jon has retreated the bishop (where Mike traded knights) – and a more classical position has appeared on board 3. Both sides can claim to have some interest in the position – although Black does seem to have solved his opening problems – but Jon got a rude shock when he opted not to castle and picked up a tempo with **11. d3? Nxf2!** leaving 12.Kxf2 Qh4+ 13.Ke3 Bc5 14.c3 e5 15.Qe1 as a messy but more or less tenable option. Jon's choice, **12.Nxe6?**, shoots Fritz into some high negatives. **12...dxe6** my preference is 12...fxe6 when 13.Kxf2 Bc5+ 14.Ke2 0–0 gives Black the f-file as well as two active bishops to continue the Sicilian torture. 15.d4 Bb6 16.c3 Bb7 17.Rg1 Qc7 18.g3] **13.Kxf2 Bc5+** when though both sides have equal material and complementary pawn structures the White king's loss of

castling privilege should prove fatal – but after an exchange of queens on move 19 the life and drama ebbed away and a handshake was in evidence by move 25. A lucky escape for City...

On the adjoining **board 4**, Mark (White, to play) was beginning to dominate proceedings, and after **25. Qd2!** the threat was f4 followed by Rd7 when the b-pawn is the first of many proposed victims, so Dave after due thought came up with **25.... g5!** This weakens the black kingside, but it also softens up that area for some later, nimble-footed sorties by the Black knight. [alternatives like 25...Nf7 26.Re4 Qc5 27.b4 Qd6 28.Qxd6 Nxd6 29.Re6 leave White with all the play] **26.f4 gxf4 27.gxf4 Nf7 28.Rd7 Rd8!** a desperation find which keeps some practical chances in the resulting ending. **29.Rxe7 Rxd2 30.Rxb7 a5 31.Ra7 Rxc2 32.Rxa5** and, though White has an extra pawn, for the moment his rook isn't ideally placed, and Black has some room to regroup ... **32...Kg7 33.Ra6 Nh6 34.a4 c5 35.a5?** natural enough, but it allows an immediate draw by perpetual. **35...Nf5 36.Kg1 Rc1+ 37.Kh2** unfortunately for White, the king can't escape via f3: 37.Kf2 Rc2+ 38.Kf3? Nh4+ **37...Rc2**

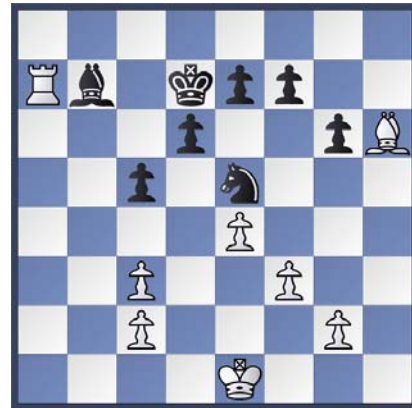
So, all square with two to go – and proceedings on bottom **board 6** were becoming cloudy, where I struggled, after an opening phase which netted a comfortable pawn, and an intricate middle phase finding the right moves at the wrong time – most usually, the moment after the last time it was easily available. So, in the diagram position, Black can help contribute to loosening the knots he finds himself in by playing ... b5, but instead play continued

20.... Re7? 21.c4 b5 22.cxb5+ Kxb5 23.Nd4+ Kb6 when it began to dawn that, without some positive action Black's extra pawn could easily become a liability. With

time running short, Black has a Knight that has no squares, a bishop blocked in on c7, and two dithering rooks wondering if it's safe to come out and play. And, with time trouble looming – both sides down to 10 or so minutes – the need for a plan was becoming paramount. Play continued to move 29 without any noticeable change in either the Fritz analysis of the position or the material comfort of the Black pieces, when Alan fatally removed the rook from its outpost, allowing ... d5, with almost immediately decisive results.

This leaves **board 1** to consider, where after a variation of the Modern known as *The Sniper*, and analysed in a monograph somewhere by Charlie Storey, Black quickly and voluntarily found himself without two bishops, in an ending, with a pawn less. Ideal, you might think, for someone with Matt's almost Fr-Ted-like penchant for bishops, but as the game proceeded it was clear that conversion of the material advantage was no easy task – no obvious pawn thrusts suggested themselves against a fluid, but secure Black position, a security that was enhanced, if anything, by the loss of the exchange.

The diagram *right* was the last moment when the players recorded moves, and moved into the bash-bash phase – (although a faithful recorder was seen with pen in hand, so any further moves received gratefully). And, with a draw enough to give the visitors a match win, and the clocks running down into 1-minute chess, a draw offer was made by Peter, and rejected by Matt... ... who wasn't aware of the match situation, and who notched up the full point with about 3 seconds to spare, on time.



Rose – Richmond
Black to play

A pleasant evening's chess ended up in the local for a few pints and chess chatter.

Sean Terry
March 23, 2011