

Allan Castle (1922-2016)

A belated remembrance of a man who contributed significantly to Leics. chess from 1950-1970.

Firstly, Allan's distinguished wartime military service must be mentioned. He was a Flight Lieutenant navigator in Bomber Command, which had the highest % mortality rate of any branch of the armed forces. Incredibly, he survived 30 missions, the average was 2 or 3, in 2 spells of duty, surely testimony both to his skill and good fortune.

He played for John Bull soon after league chess re-started post-war and by 1951/2 its team, with Allan on top board, was in Division 1. However, it struggled and the leading players moved away. Allan joined Victoria, which met at Church House, next to the Cathedral.

Victoria was a force in Div.1 and Allan proved strong enough to rotate board 1 with Philip Collier, twice county champion, the most influential figure in Leics. Chess from 1940-1965. The team, based on Collier, Castle and the formidable Charlie Cordel, went on to win several titles. Allan's own results were good, as shown by his selection on Bd.2 for the Leics. League in a match against the Coventry League.

Allan had already established himself in the county team by 1950 and rose to Bd.4. His grade approached 190 before he missed a year or two for business reasons. Subsequently he did not quite get back to this standard but continued to perform faithfully and well for his club and county.

He became a part of the "hierarchy" at Church House, the home of the powerful Leicestershire club. Most of the better players in Leics. were members, in addition to their league clubs. It was the venue for many competitions and Allan was involved in the administration in the 1950s and more so during the following decade. Amongst other things he ran the Leics. club's championship, which was usually fiercely contested, and impressed with his intelligent, cool approach to organisation.

Accordingly, Allan was appointed tournament secretary for the Leics. Chess Council and introduced a new structure to the prestigious county championship tournament. The ideal format had been a subject of discussion for years and his solution was a divisional system, with strict promotion and relegation. At its inception those entrants perceived to be the best 10 players were placed in Division 1 and 3 other tiers were similarly formed. (grading numbers were not yet so dominant)

Whilst this concept maintained the tradition of the champion emerging from an elite group, it introduced extra elements of competition and was welcomed initially. Yet some critics cautioned there existed an inherent danger of hindering the progress of promising juniors. Sadly, this proved to be the case and the Castle system gradually lost favour, before being discarded in 1969, after 4 seasons.

After Collier's death in December 1965, Allan looked set to be his successor and took over the county captaincy, a post he held for 2 ½ years. Again, despite a thoughtful and systematic, if somewhat authoritarian and conservative, policy, some of Allan's selections were questioned and his teams underperformed.

Undoubtedly Allan would have been a highly suitable leader 10 years earlier. His shortcoming appeared to be a lack of flexibility at a time when attitudes were changing rapidly – other clubs and a younger element were starting to challenge the supremacy of the Leics. club and the old guard.

Allan may have withdrawn from chess due to a sense of disappointment, which, perhaps, clouded his life generally at that point. He had progressed from employment at John Bull to establish his own

thriving business in rubber components. It succeeded well enough to be of interest to a much larger competitor and succumbed to an unwanted takeover, leaving Allan thwarted and frustrated.

Even though his best endeavours ultimately fell onto stony ground, Allan's efforts on behalf of Leics. chess deserve to be acknowledged. Hopefully the rest of his long life brought him satisfaction in other areas.