

The man who beat Lasker



Spot the chess player!

Last year I wrote a brief history of Plymouth Chess Club's annual championship competition for our website. The club was founded in 1888 and I thought it would be good to document what we know about past championship formats, trophies and winners. Over the years forty individuals had won the coveted title of club champion. Having previously put together a short history of the club, most of the past champions I had some knowledge of. However in the list of past champions there were a few names I hadn't previously come across and to be honest, I did not pay too much attention to them. I assumed they were decent club players who were fortunate to have a good run in the championship in one or two seasons but otherwise had made no impact beyond club level.

One of those names was two time winner (1897 and 1898) H A Adamson. I then came across the game below on chessgames.com in which he beat Emmanuel Lasker in a simultaneous display organised by the club four years after Lasker had become World Champion. After some internet searching I found a special edition of British Endgame Study News from 1996 dedicated to 'The Studies of H. A. Adamson' - <http://www.jsbeasley.co.uk/besn/s1.pdf>. This had the following information:

(Henry Anthony) Adamson was born in Ealing, London, in 1871, but he spent most of his later life in Falmouth. He died in 1941, and an obituary by T. R. Dawson appears on page 275 of that year's BCM. Dawson describes him as "a powerful mathematician, third wrangler of his year [third in the mathematical graduation list at Cambridge], and a brilliant chess problem analyst." Most of his composition was in the field of fairy chess, where Dawson rated him very highly indeed. He played on top board for Cornwall, and as an endgame analyst he was correspondingly strong if not quite in the class of Grigoriev.

With further research I found that after his time in Plymouth, Adamson became a mathematics teacher at Sherborne School, Dorset where he taught from 1901 to 1908. In 1909 he married but his wife sadly died from tuberculosis in 1912. By then they were settled in Falmouth and in his new home county of Cornwall he won the county championship in 1912, 1913 and 1914.

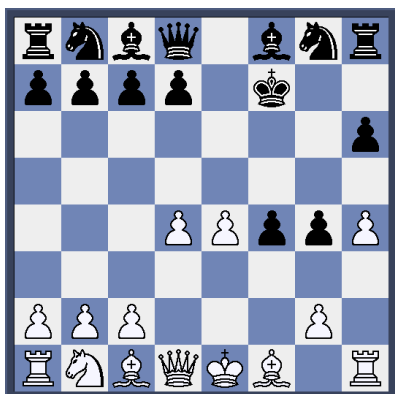
I have been able to find only one photograph of Adamson. In June 1905 to mark 1,200 years since the founding of the town of Sherborne, a historical pageant was staged, which involved around 900 local people. Members of the Sherborne School teaching staff put on a performance and in their group photograph above we see Adamson dressed as a monk. With a bit of imagination he could perhaps be seen as a Bishop defending the King!

Emanuel Lasker vs Henry Anthony Adamson
Plymouth, 16-Nov-1898
King's Gambit: Accepted. Allgaier Gambit Thorold Attack

1. e4 e5 2. f4 exf4 3. Nf3 g5 4. h4 g4 5. Ng5

The Allgaier Gambit - 5.Ne5, the Kieseritzky Gambit is the main line.

5 ... h6 6. Nxf7 Kxf7 7. d4



Henry Anthony Adamson

This is the Thorold Attack, the most popular line of the Allgaier Gambit although computers prefer the main alternative, Bc4+.

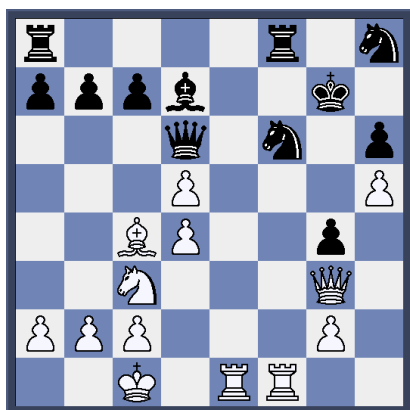
7. ... d5 8. Nc3 Nf6 9. Bxf4 Nc6

9. ... Bb4 was good e.g., 10. Be2 Bxc3+ 11. bxc3 Nxe4.

10. exd5 Bd6 11. Qd2

11. Bxd6 Qxd6 12. dxc6 leaves the position open with both kings exposed but the computer evaluates it as completely level.

11... Bxf4 12. Qxf4 Ne7 13. Bc4 Ng6 14. Qf2 Rf8 15. h5 Nh8 16. O-O-O Kg7 17. Rhf1 Bd7 18. Qg3 Qe7 19. Rde1 Qd6



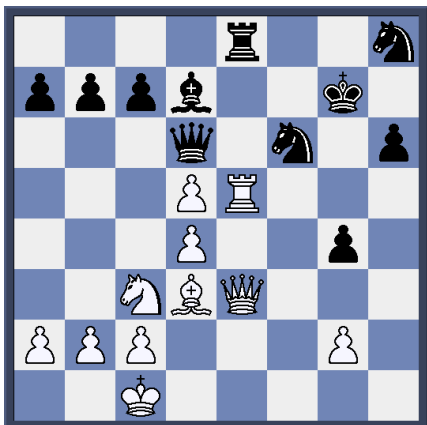
20. Re5?

20. Qxd6 was best but World Champions giving simuls naturally play to win and with the Queens off and the centre blocked, attacking chances would be much reduced. Unfortunately the moved played is a mistake which Black exploits.

20... Nxh5 21. Qe3 Rxf1+

When you have a significant material advantage, exchange pieces.

22. Bxf1 Re8 23. Bd3 Nf6



24. Nb5?

It's hard for White to make progress but this allows Black to simplify and come out a clear piece up. The best for White could have been: 24. Ne2 Nxd5 25. Qe4 Nf6 26. Qxb7 Rxe5 27. dxe5 Qxe5 28. Qxa7 and it's a position a World Champion might be able to hold. However we can be sure Lasker was not interested in playing a long and difficult endgame in the hope he might salvage a draw!

24... Bxb5 25. Bxb5 Nxd5 26. Qe4 Rxe5 27. dxe5 Qe6 28. Be2 Ng6

If White takes on g4, Black takes on e5 so White resigns.

Adamson defended accurately and deserved his win.

According to comments posted on chessgames.com there are two versions of the results for this simul, both of which we can assume are correct. One comment says a report in the Devon and Exeter Gazette gave the score at closing time as +21 -1 (Lasker vs H A Adamson) with 9 games to be adjudicated. Another comment states the final results were: +24=4-3. On that website, in addition to the Adamson game there are three other games from the event. A win over 15 times Plymouth club champion Thomas Taylor, a draw against 4 times club champion C F Cooper and a loss to D W Earle – the last two presumably adjudicated. All four games were under 30 moves and play in the Cooper and Earle games stopped at move 25. For much of his career Lasker used Exhibition matches (as simuls were referred to) to support himself. Presumably he took a very pragmatic approach and made his excuses and left as soon as he had beaten the majority of his opponents.

I don't have any record of DW Earle being a Plymouth club member but it's highly likely he was. Using the power of Google I was able to find one more reference to him, drawing against H E Bird in a simul in Plymouth in 1890. So he must have been quite a useful player and I think we can claim him as one of ours.

The 27 year period Lasker was World Champion was not a golden age for chess but nevertheless holding the title for so long was a great achievement. If Magnus Carlsen wants to beat this he will need to retain his title for another 21 years by which time he will be 50!

Martin Quinn

Plymouth Chess Club secretary

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