

THE FIRST MIDLANDS COUNTY TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

MCCU Middlegame March 2004

Following on from the historical extracts from old Year books referred to in issue 8, I have been fortunate to get hold of a copy of a history of chess in Leicester. This was written by Don Gould to commemorate the Centenary of the club in 1960. It is a remarkable piece of work, all the more so as it was produced prior to the days of computers and word processing facilities.

A section in it refers to the formation of the Midland Counties Chess Association which became the MCCU and to the first Midland County Team Championship.

The 1897/8 competition was run on a knock-out system. Chess clocks were used, with the rate of moves being 20 per hour. Leicestershire beat Nottinghamshire 7-5. They then had a bye in the quarterfinal round and played Derbyshire in the semi-finals. The first match was a 6-6 draw, and as this was before the days of board count or bottom board elimination being used as tie-breakers, there had to be a replay. Leicestershire won this 9-3.

The Final took place in Birmingham on Saturday May 7th 1898. the Birmingham Daily Post reported on the match *"there was a goodly crowd of chess enthusiasts present throughout the proceedings, and the evening's play saw some thirty or forty concentrated round board one alone – that needless to say, being between the celebrated experts captaining the teamsIn respect of the result, the match must be regarded as perhaps the most extraordinary on record, draw after draw was reported, until of ten games finished only one reached a decisive termination. It had been generally expected that the Worcester team would account fairly easily for their opponents, but the Leicester side had evidently been considerably under-rated.The game on Board 1 was a fine specimen of match play, Mr Atkins's careful accurate and well-ordered attack being much admired, while the stubborn and ingenious defence of the Dudley player also deserves a meed of praise. There is little need to speak of the other games, only a very few of them being legitimate draws."*

Atkins won board 1 for Leics, there were the 9 draws agreed over the board, and the remaining 2 board went to adjudication, James Mason declared both boards draws.

The Leics team consisted of (in board order) H E Atkins; E H Collier; W J Withers; Dr H Mason; A C Garrett; W B Clark; Dr Finch; A F Atkins; F Moore; C Greig; J W Barrs & W E Lant.

The Worcs team was G E H Bellingham; W Bridgwater; Frank Brown; F G Jones; Fred Brown; H Le Patourel; G R Penney; S Weal; D Campbell; T J Cherryson; A H Davies & F S Hoyle.