A History of Totnes Chess Club
125th anniversary edition

Preface

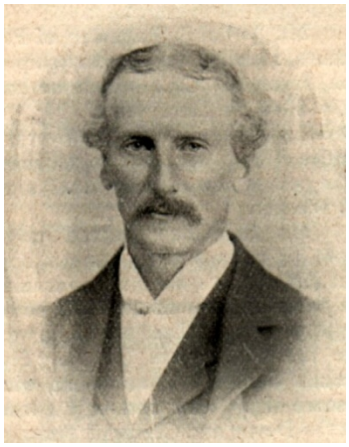
In many ways the game of chess has been transformed in recent decades. Players of all strengths can access chess engines which would outplay the world champion. The Chess.com website has over 250 million users. However for many people the real joy of chess is found when two people are sat at a chess board in a quiet room, locked in mental combat and moving physical chess pieces. This is the environment chess clubs seek to provide and this is the story of one such club which has welcomed chess players for 125 years (on and off!) at the time of writing.

I am aware of many significant gaps in this document. I am not a historian and I haven't searched out original sources in my research. This version of the club's history has been compiled largely from what I could find on the internet plus information on more recent history based on conversations with people familiar with the events. The single most important source has been the biographies compiled by Bob Jones (see endnotes). I acknowledge the major contribution these have made and apologise for any glaring examples of plagiarism. Responsibility for all errors and omissions is of course mine.

Martin Quinn (Club Secretary)
March 2026

The first quarter century: 1901 to 1926

In the late 19th and early 20th century there appears to have been a surge of interest in chess which led to the formation of a large number of chess clubs, many of which are still welcoming players today. We cannot be sure why this happened but perhaps like the growth in popularity of the game in the decade following the world championship match between Spassky and Fischer in 1972, the inaugural world championship in 1886 Steinitz and Zukertort may have been a factor. We know Plymouth Chess Club was established in 1888, the current Exeter club in 1895 (another club may have pre-dated this), Teignmouth club in 1901 and here in Totnes, a chess club was formed also in 1901, on 2nd October. The man who is credited with its formation is Charles Thomas Blanshard.



The founder of the Totnes Chess Club in 1901 – Charles Blanshard (1852-1924)

The club is said to have had its origins in the relationship between Douglas Fawcett and Blanshard who had been playing friendly games in Totnes for some time before. Edward Winter-Wood became President of the new club, Fawcett the Vice President, with Blanshard described as 'the hard working Secretary'.

Blanshard was active in chess is many ways, he published five chess books, including a series entitled Chess Master Play, which gave the best games played in international tournaments between 1887 and 1896. There were also three small volumes called Classified Chess Openings. He started a chess column in the Plymouth-based Western Daily Mercury which he edited together with the Secretary of the new Cornwall Chess Association.

In October 1902 the same month that the club was founded, Devon played the first of many matches against Cornwall and to everyone's surprise, Cornwall came out on top 15.5 – 9.5. There was a return match just months later on 23rd January 1903 and Devon just edged it, winning 13 -12. A Totnes trio - Fawcett, Blanshard and J. E. D. Moysey (who we'll hear more about later), all won their games.

The Totnes club quickly became a force to be reckoned with, and of the eight players in the Devon County Chess Association's 2nd championship in 1903, three were from the Totnes club - Fawcett, Blanshard and Moysey again. Unfortunately none of them made it to the podium; Fawcett was fourth on 3 points, Blanshard sixth on 2.5 and Moysey seventh on 2 points.

The first president of the Totnes Chess Club
Edward J. Winter-Wood (1847 - 1920)

We do not know how long Winter-Wood continued his involvement with the Totnes club but he remained a major figure in Devon chess for many years and seemed to have a habit of acquiring 'President' positions! In 1907 he was elected as President of the Devon County Chess Association (DCCA). He held the position for 13 years until his death at Paignton in 1920. On his appointment, the chess correspondent of the Devon & Exeter Gazette wrote:

'... It is impossible to estimate the amount of good Mr. Winter-Wood has done for the cause, but his reputation as a composer and solver of problems is world-wide, while as a player he was one of the strongest of his day. Even if for no other reason his connection with chess in the county is sufficient qualification, for he is president of the Paignton and Plymouth clubs, and a vice-president of the Torquay Chess Club.... He has already signalled his accession to the position by a most welcome gift. In a letter received by Mr. George W. Cutler, he wrote:- "By wireless telegraphy I have just heard that a silver cup or trophy would be acceptable to the Association. If this is correct, I shall have much pleasure in presenting, say, a five-guinea one".'

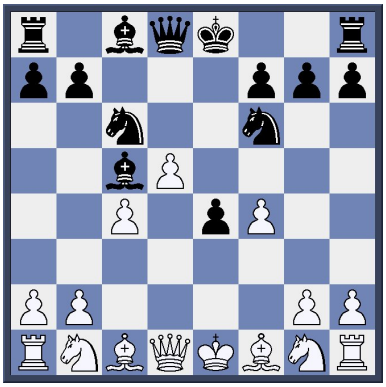
The Winter-Wood trophy is still awarded to the individual Devon county champion each season.

References to J. E. D. Moysey always include his full initials so perhaps he was known as Jed – his name was James Eccles Dimond Moysey (1882 – 1951). It would appear his younger days were spent in Devon before moving to London and finally Luton in 1933 where he was manager of the Midland Hotel. In an article in *Newsflash* in 1983 G.H. Diggle wrote:
But the most brilliant Luton player (on his day) was the late J.E.D. Moysey …. Moysey was a portly man of aristocratic mien and when presiding at his Hotel Bar frequently indulged in animated and dogmatic estimates of London players he had met – his favourite derogatory phrase, delivered in his strong public school accent, was: "He's a mere CAFFYHOUSE player!".

However it was when he was a member of the Totnes Chess Club that he achieved his greatest claim to fame with a win over the reigning World Champion, Emanuel Lasker. The Lasker v Moysey game was reported in the June 1908 *BCM*: *'The following interesting game was played by Dr Lasker against 23 opponents at Totnes on March 5th.*

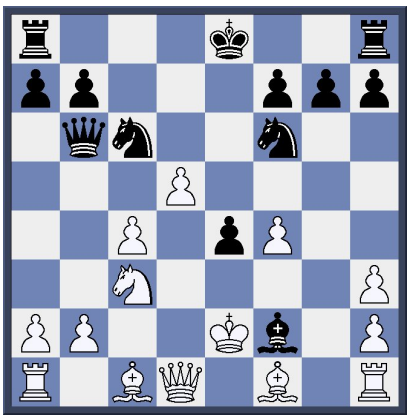
Falkbeer Countergambit (Notes by MQ)

1. e4 e5 2. f4 d5 3. exd5 e4 4. d4 Nf6 5. c4 c6 6. dxc6 Nxc6 7. d5 Bc5



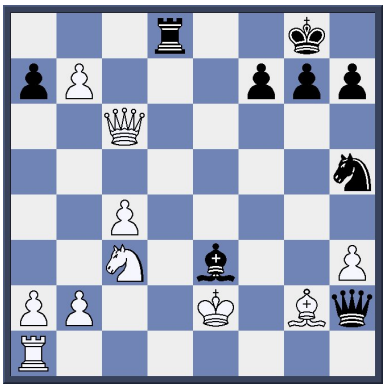
8. Nc3
The Knight cannot be taken 8.dxc6 Bf2+ 9.Ke2 Bg4+

8. … Qb6 9. Nh3 Bxh3 10. gxh3 Bf2+ 11. Ke2



11. ….e3
Up to this point Moysey has had the initiative but after this it passes to White. 11. … Bg1 was probably best. There was no forced win but the threats of Qf2 or Nd4 – Nf3 would make anyone nervous.

12. dxc6 Qc5 13. Bg2 Rd8 14. Qa4 O-O 15. Qb5 Qd4 16. Rd1 Qxf4 17. cxb7 Qxh2 18. Qc6 Nh5 19. Bxe3 Bxe3 20. Rxd8 Rxd8



21. Kxe3??
The winning move for the World Champion would have been 21.Rd1! The engine advises that after 21. … Nf4+ 22.Kxe3 there would follow a series of checks which eventually come to an end and the b pawn and Queen are decisive for White.

Moysey is reported to have confidently announced to Dr Lasker that he had a forced mate in four (actually it's three). 21…Qf4+ 22.Ke2 Rd2+ 23.Ke1 Qf2 mate

We know relatively little about what type of chess club it was in those early years – how many members it had and what activities it organised for its members. However the number of players in the Lasker simul (23) is an indication of the size of the club. Clearly it was well supported.

Despite the involvement in the Totnes club of a number of men who were major figures in Devon chess, there can be no doubt that the most famous member of all in the club's early years was Edith (Winter-Wood) Baird (1859 –1924), the sister of the club's first president. Edith was a chess composer who in her day was the most prolific composer of chess problems in the world. She published under her married name as Mrs. W. J. Baird (using her husband's initials as well as surname) and was sometimes referred to in the press as the "Queen of Chess". We do not know how long Edith was associated with the club and may not have known of it at all had it not been that at the DCCA's A.G.M. in October 1924, the General Secretary, George W. Cutler, reported on the passing 'Mrs. W. J. Baird, the Secretary of the Totnes Club'. It was also reported that Charles Blanshard, the club's founder and first secretary had also died that year. A sad year for the club.

Edith Elina Helen Baird - née Winter-Wood
(1859 - 1924)

Edith was born at the family home of Hareston Manor, Brixton in the South Hams. The youngest child of Thomas Winter Wood, her father and her older brothers being Edward and Carslake were all strong chess players and enthusiastic organisers of the game. However we should not underestimate the restrictions on the lives of women at the time. As previously mentioned, the Plymouth Chess Club first opened its doors in 1888 but it was not until 1903 that women became eligible for membership. Perhaps this is the reason she put her energy into composing chess studies rather than over the board chess. Edith composed over 2,000 problems winning a number of 1st places in competitions and published two notable books of her compositions - in 1902 *Seven Hundred Chess Problems*, and in 1907 *The Twentieth Century Retractor*.

If you carry out a Google search for 'the most famous chess composers of all time' it is likely to produce a list of between 8 and 16 people and Edith's name will be there, the only woman on the list.

There is a biography of Edith on the Chess.com website (see endnotes) with a number of examples of problems she composed. It also has a game which she drew against the Dutch master Rudolf Loman who was playing a 6 board blindfold simultaneous.

There was much more to Edith's achievements than chess. She was an accomplished painter and illustrator, and inherited her father's talent for poetry. She was a skilful archer and a regular prize-winner. In politics she was a Liberal and very much against all cruelty to animals whether for sport or science. She lived in Paignton but she must have felt at home in Totnes!

The Championship trophy

Inscribed as follows: *Presented to the Totnes Chess Club by JW Morrison Esq. To be held by the winner of the club handicap annually 1922*

In 2009 the club closed due to falling membership numbers. Fortunately Rob Wilby the secretary at the time kept hold of this trophy which was awarded to the winners of the club championships. The names of the winners have been engraved on the cup or its plinth and so it provides us with a record of champions from 1923 until the present and the gaps give an indication of when the club was inactive (see annex). It is understood there were other trophies in the club's past but where these ended up, we do not know.

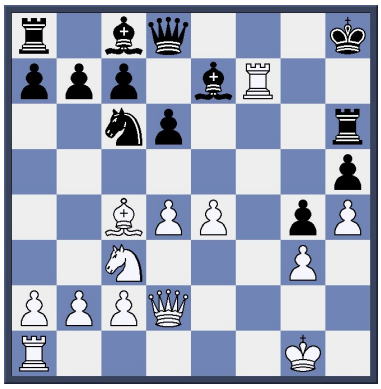
The trophy has the silver mark 'GWS EPBM'. This refers to electroplated silver items produced by G.W.S. (likely a Sheffield maker, sometimes associated with James Dixon & Sons or similar) using a base metal of Britannia metal (a pewter-like alloy). So EPBM stands for Electro-Plated Britannia Metal. We owe a debt of gratitude to JW Morrison Esq. but know nothing about him other than his generosity.

There probably were club competitions between 1901 and 1922 but I am not aware of any record of these. The first name to appear on the trophy is HR Allingham who was club champion in 1923. Someone called HR Allingham played chess for the Surrey county team the years from 1903 to 1906 and it is likely it's the same chap, perhaps when he was a teenager. Our first known club champion was clearly a very strong chess player as he won the individual championship of Devon in 1912, 1913 and 1923.

In 1918 the British Chess Magazine published the following game which was played between Dr HR Allingham and Mr A Doyle, both of Totnes on 8 November 1917. (Notes by MQ)

The opening is the Vienna, Hamppe-Allgaier gambit – this is the sort of thing they did back in the day!

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 exf4 4.Nf3 g5 5.h4 g4 6.Ng5 h6 7.Nxf7 Kxf7 8.d4 d6 9.Bc4+ Kg7 10.Bxf4 Be7 11.g3 Na5 12.Be2 h5 13.0–0 Nc6 14.Bc4 Nh6 15.Bxh6+ Rxh6 16.Rf7+ Kh8 17.Qd2



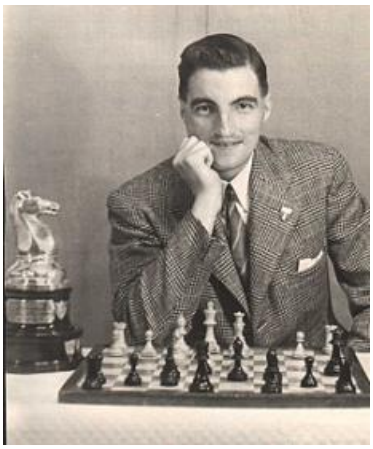
17. Bf8?
This is the losing move but in pre-engine days it passes without a comment. Black is on a tightrope but after Rg6 the assessment is just a small plus to White. One continuation which might have been interesting is: 17…Rg6 18.Nd5 Bxh4 19.gxh4 Be6 20.Rf2 g3 21.Rf4 Bg4

18.Raf1 Bg7 19.Rxg7!!
The !! is from BCM

19 … Kxg7 20.Rf7+ Kg6 21.Ne2
Mate is threatened and only giving up the Queen can prevent it (21…d5 22.Bxd5 Qxd5 23.exd5) so Black resigned.

The last club champion from this period was recorded on the Cup in 1926 and for reasons unknown, the club appears to have become inactive for quarter of a century.

The arrival of Mr Jones and the club reopens



John Edwin Jones (1922 - 1994)

Born in Wolverhampton, Jones (who appears to have been referred to as Eddy or Edwin) had a childhood of some poverty but with an education funded with various scholarships, he was able to get a place at Oxford University to read Classics. His time at Oxford was interrupted by the war although he didn't see active service. It's not clear when he became a chess player but on his return to Oxford he was strong enough to play in the 1946 and 1947 Varsity Matches against Cambridge University. After university he moved back to the Wolverhampton area to work as a teacher and became a major figure in the local chess scene becoming general secretary of Staffordshire chess association and individual county champion. In 1951 he got a job at King Edward VI Grammar School, Totnes and as he had in Staffordshire, he soon made his mark on the Devon chess scene. As previously mentioned, the former Totnes Chess Club had closed in 1926, Bob Jones's biography of JE Jones states: *Within a month of arriving, Jones had reformed the Totnes Club, retrieving the old club's equipment and trophies that had languished for over a quarter century in the vaults of a local bank, and setting up meetings at Redworth School. Its first events were a simultaneous display by Jones who won every game. This was followed by a lightning tournament in which Messrs Taylor, Payne and Hawke came 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively.*

In 1957 Jones made plans to found a new League based on clubs in the Torbay area. In his Western Morning News chess column in June 1957 he reported: *"Plans are in hand for the Torbay area to have its own league next season. Initially, the league will be composed on one or more teams from the Paignton, Teignmouth, Torquay and Totnes clubs, but it is hoped to foster the foundation of clubs in other places in the area where no organised chess exists at present*".

The Torbay Chess League (TCL) began life with two divisions and in the first two seasons the Totnes club won the second division. In 1959/60 it won both first and second divisions, a feat it hasn't repeated - yet!

Jones took on a huge workload on behalf of the chess community. In 1961/62 he was the DCCA Competition Secretary, DCCA Congress Secretary, TCL Secretary, Totnes Club Secretary and West of England Chess Union Grading Officer. In days before email, messaging, spreadsheets etc, this final role alone would have been hugely demanding. It wasn't a task he delegated; he examined all the game results from eight counties.

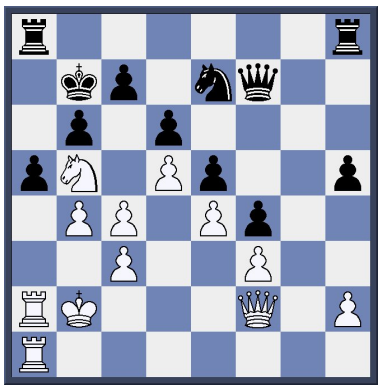
In 1964 he left Totnes and moved back to the midlands and moved again in 1966 to Manchester to become a lecturer in teacher training. In 1977 he took early retirement and returned to Totnes. However shortly after the move he suffered a heart attack and seems to have then taken life easier. In 1992 he made his final house move to near Ipswich.

Jones had made a huge contribution to chess in Totnes, in Devon and beyond but speaking to people who knew him would suggest he was not always an easy person to work with. Details of some of his numerous clashes are in Bob Jones' biography of him (see endnotes).

A very strong chess player with FIDE rating of 2245 in 1976, Jones played only once in the British Championship. In the 1952 championship he had a respectable result, drawing eight games including against a couple of well known figures in British chess at the time, Gerald Abrahams and William Ritson Morry. Below is one of his three losses, Black against IM Bob Wade who won the event.

Vienna Game (Notes by MQ)

1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 Nf6 3. d3 Nc6 4. Nc3 Bb4 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bxf6 Bxc3+ 7. bxc3 Qxf6 8. Ne2 Ne7 9. Qd2 g5 10. Qe3 d6 11. f3 Ng6 12. g3 Be6 13. Bb3 h5 14. O-O-O Bxb3 15. axb3 b6 16. c4 Ne7 17. Rhf1 O-O-O 18. Kb2 Kb7 19. Ra1 a5 20. Nc3 Qg7 21. Nb5 Nc6 22. c3 f6 23. Ra2 Ra8 24. d4 Qf7 25. d5 Ne7 26. Rfa1 f5 27. b4 f4 28. gxf4 gxf4 29. Qf2



29... axb4??
After 20 moves the game was quite level but Jones has since played passively while Wade has been preparing for an attack down the a file. In a very difficult position for Black, Rhb8 may have been best.

30. Rxa8?
Wade misses a nice finish 30. Ra7+ Rxa7 31. Rxa7+ Kb8 32. Rxc7 and only giving up the Queen will delay mate.

30... Rxa8 31. Rxa8 Kxa8 32. Nxc7+ Kb7 33. Nb5 bxc3+ 34. Kxc3 Qg6 35. Qh4 Nc8 36. Qd8 Qg7 37. Kb4 h4 38. h3
Black's d6 pawn will soon fall and so Jones resigned.

After the Jones years

Following the departure of Edwin Jones in 1964 the club appears to have continued as a small but active club for over 40 years but it lacked higher rated players who might have enabled it to achieve success in external leagues. For example, in the 1978 grading list, 14 players were listed for the Totnes club with double club champion Frank Chambers the highest rated at 127, about 1700 under the current ECF rating system.

Interestingly, in this period of the club's history it was reported in the 1976 edition of Westward Ho!, the bulletin of the West of England Chess Union that in November of that year, the 11th Torbay Chess Congress

was held in Totnes. Details of the venue are not provided. Presumably some of the Totnes club members would have played a role in the event.

The Championship cup is engraved with the names of its winners in this period up to 1982 (with a gap 1962 - 1966) and then again on the plinth from 1993. It's not clear if there were no club championships held during these gap periods or if it was just a failure to engrave the names. In 2001 the last club champion of this period had their name engraved on the trophy. Again, it's not clear if this was the last time a championship competition took place or just a failure to add names. The club continued for a few more years and for a spell it seems to have specialised in the rapidplay form of the game, winning the TCL rapidplay league in three of the four seasons from 2003/04 to 2006/07.

The club's last hurrah in the TCL was in the 2008/09 season when it fielded two teams, rather sadly losing all six matches in division 1 but again being competitive in the rapidplay league, finishing a close second to the new kids on the block, Newton Abbot (established in 2005).

Finally from this period of the club's history, a tale of Mike Boag, club champion in 1980 and 1981. He had previously been the match captain in the Exeter chess club and this story is on that club's website:

… Mike and family moved to Torquay, bought a small cafe, and converted it into a chess haven. He would hire sets out and serve sensible food. He used to take on all-corners at five-minute games, and got so proficient against the locals that he offered a slap-up meal to anyone who could beat him.

Unfortunately a group of evil-minded Exeter players decided to set Mike up. They arranged for the then Teignmouth champion (who Mike did not know) to call in for a cup of tea, and let himself be persuaded into a rapidplay game. Mike was duly taken to the cleaners, left Torquay, and was last heard of running a barge down the Grand Union Canal for tourists.

Phoenix-like, Totnes Chess Club is reborn

Again Totnes found itself without a chess club and chess players in the area either went further afield to play at chess clubs elsewhere or stopped playing competitive chess. There was an attempt at reviving the club in the 2019/20 season with teams playing in the top two divisions of the TCL but due to Covid or other factors this didn't gain momentum.

However we can date the start of revival of the club as 2019 which is when Charlie Howard and Clive Liggatt began to meet to play chess in the cafe of the Totnes Cinema. Not only did they have games against each other but they actively engaged with interested passers-by and more chess players of all standards began to turn up to play. During the Covid lockdowns that followed, The Queen's Gambit Netflix drama series was exceptionally successful and interest in the game increased significantly, as did participation in online chess. Post-Covid, there was again the appetite for over the board chess and Saturday morning casual chess in the Cinema cafe grew steadily and is now a well known part of Totnes life. On a recent morning 14 boards (28 players) were in use.

Out of this group of chess players were a number who were keen re-establish a chess club that would provide the opportunity for competitive club chess. Charlie and Clive together with cafe attendees, Martin Goldschmidt and Kit Nicholson began to organise and in 2022/23 they were able to field teams in TCL Division 1 and the Rapidplay league. In May 2023 Paignton based Grandmaster Keith Arkell gave a simultaneous display for the club and agreed to play for the club whenever he was available.

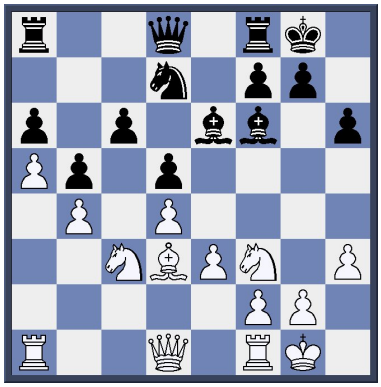
Keith Arkell has been and remains one of the most active Grandmasters in Britain and has had many tournament successes as detailed in his Wikipedia page. He won the 50 years plus section of 2014 European Senior Chess Championship in Porto and later that year he was voted the English Chess Federation's Player of the Year.

In 2002 he finished half a point behind the joint winners of the Gausdal Classics tournament. During the event he played a young rising star of Norwegian chess.

Arkell, Keith C vs Carlsen, Magnus
Queen's Gambit Declined (notes by MQ)

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. c4 e6 4. Nc3 Be7 5. Bg5 h6 6. Bxf6 Bxf6 7. cxd5 exd5 8. b4
b4 is an uncommon move which possibly took young Magnus out of his book knowledge.

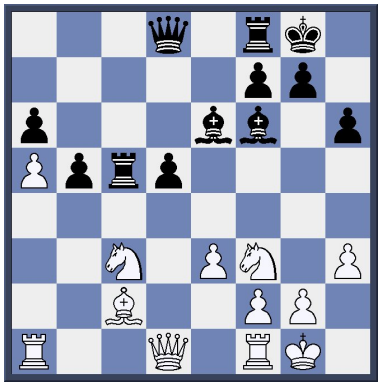
8. ...O-O 9. e3 c6 10. h3 Be6 11. Bd3 Nd7 12. O-O b5 13. a4 a6 14. a5



14. ... c5!
Nice move! This kid is going to go far!!

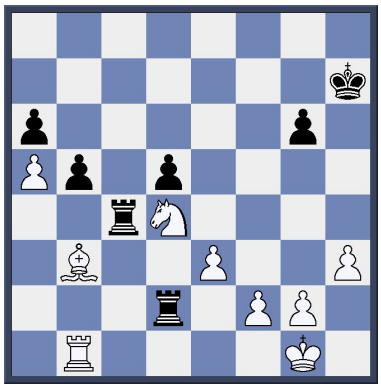
15. bxc5 Nxc5 16. Bc2 Rc8?
Black sees a pin on the c3 Knight but things aren't so simple. Nb7 would have been fine.

17. dxc5 Rxc5



18. Qd3!
White threatens mate and enables the pin to be blocked. With a piece for a pawn advantage, he now has to negotiate through a complex series of exchanges.

18. .... g6 19. Nd4 Bf5 20. Nxf5 Rxc3 21. Nxh6+ Kh7 22. Nxf7 Rxd3 23. Nxd8 Rd2 24. Ne6 Rc8
25. Bb3 Bxa1 26. Rxa1 Rc3 27. Rb1 Rc4 28. Nd4



Black has no good options. Giving up a rook for a piece and a pawn would leave him a clear piece down. Likewise if he tried to extract his rooks he would lose at least a pawn in the process. Magnus was only 11 years old but did the sensible thing and resigned. The moral of this story, try to beat them when they are young, you may never get another chance!

The great thing about having an exceptionally strong player on board 1 is that not only is the team almost guaranteed a top board win, but everyone else drops a board and thereby increasing the team's winning chances. And so it was, in the 2023/24 season Keith won all of the 5 games he played for the 1st team and the club won Division 1 of the Torbay Chess League.

Totnes chess club is back! The Torbay Chess League Division 1 trophy for 2023/24 is presented to Chris Collins.

In 2024/25 the Division 1 team repeated their success in the TCL. Also that season, as well as a Division 3 team, the club also entered a Division 4 team which aimed to give experience to players who are new to competitive chess. The club was aware of its role in encouraging and developing those new to the game.

The one thing the club hadn't quite achieved since its revival was a programme of regular internal club chess. In 2025/26 this was established with fortnightly club evenings and 18 players competing in Championship and Challengers divisions. After a 25 year hiatus a new Champion's name will soon be engraved on the trophy.

Here's to the next 125 years!

Endnotes

- Chess.com article on Edith Baird: https://www.chess.com/blog/ThePawnSlayer/the-queen-of-chess-problems-the-life-and-problems-of-edith-baird

- Bob Jones' biographies of Edward Winter-Wood, Edith Baird, Charles Blanshard and John Edwin Jones: https://web.archive.org/web/20160316132334/http://www.chessdevon.co.uk/HTML/Pioneers/base.htm

- Bob Jones' biography of E Douglas Fawcett: https://www.keverelchess.com/category/bios

- Keith Arkell's Wikipedia entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Arkell

- Archive of the Torbay Chess League – results and league tables: https://www.torbaychessleague.com/archive.html

- Historic results of Devon County Chess Association competitions have not been available. If these are located in future, details will be added.

- Club venues: This history of Totnes Chess Club has barely mentioned where the club has been physically based. This is mainly because information on this is very limited and the little we know is as follows: When John Edwin Jones restarted the club in 1951 it met at Redworth Secondary Modern School. Later and for many years the club was based at Birdwood House on the High Street before moving to the Meadowbrook centre in Dartington which most people remember as being an especially noisy venue. The chess flame in Totnes was relit seven years ago in the cafe of the Totnes Cinema with casual chess played there on Saturday mornings. The cafe has never been a formal venue for the club but is perhaps its spiritual home. The Albatross event space hosted the club for a little while before it moved to its current home, the Assembly room of the Royal Seven Stars Hotel.

Annex

Totnes Chess Club Champions as recorded on the Club Trophy			
Names engraved on the Trophy		Names engraved on the plinth	
Year	**Winner(s)**	**Year**	**Winner(s)**
1923	HR Allingham	1993	S Player & T Thynne
1924	JS Martin	1994	J Foster
1925	WJ Belam	1995	J Allen
1926	JG Buckner	1996	C Deakin
1927 to 1953 No names recorded		1997	S Knight
1954	JE Jones	1998	C Deakin
1955	JE Jones	1999	R Wilby
1956	PO Hawke	2000	R Wilby
1957	JE Jones & PO Hawke	2001	J Parker
1958	PO Hawke	*2002 to 2025 No names recorded*	
1959	JE Jones	2026	TBC
1960	JE Jones & A Wilkinson		
1961	JE Jones		
1962 to 1966 No names recorded			
1967	E Cooper		
1968	M Blake		
1969	J Kingston		
1970	F Chambers		
1971	M Blake & G Hardman		
1972	AJ Cooper		
1973	AJ Cooper		
1974	GFJ Fisher		
1975	AM Dunlop		
1976	F Chambers		
1977	GFJ Fisher		
1978	GFJ Fisher		
1979	E Cooper		
1980	M Boag		
1981	M Boag		
1982	JE Smith		
1983 to 1992 No names recorded			