

DURBAN CHESS CLUB BULLETIN.

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Editor : M.M. MILLAR, P.O. Box 1447, DURBAN.

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EARLY DAYS OF THE DURBAN CHESS CLUB.

Last year, the Durban Chess Club presented its eightieth annual report and it was indeed in the year 1893, on the 18th August, that the Club was formed at a meeting held in the "Barrow Green Cafe", in West Street. The Chairman of the first meeting was Mr. J.F. King (whose business continues to flourish in the City) and the first President of the Club was a famous Natal figure, the Hon. Harry Escombe Q.C. M.L.A.

It appears that the Durban Chess Club was not the first Chess Club to be formed in Durban. This honour fell to the Berea Chess Club who were superseded by the Durban Chess Club which took over the equipment of the former.

It is interesting to note that during its first year, the Club enrolled 72 members - so the Club has not really grown all that much over the last 80 odd years! The first tournament was won by Harry Escombe himself although it appears that the first Championship tournament proper was only held in 1895 when S.C. Chard emerged as the winner.

In 1899, the third South African Championship (the first to be organised by the Durban Chess Club) was held in Durban - the winner being A. Michael of Johannesburg. Play started on Monday, 3rd April and continued until mid-day on Saturday, 8th April during which period each competitor had to complete no less than 13 games. So it seems that there were some days upon which a contestant had to play 3 games! One of the competitors was Dr. Max Blieden who played competitive Chess in South Africa for more than 50 years and who died not long ago in his nineties.

Throughout its long history, the Durban Chess Club has only produced one South African Champion - J.C. Archer who won the title in 1935. From all accounts, Archer is commonly acknowledged to be the finest player ever produced by the Durban Chess Club - in fact the quality of his games is such that it is arguable whether or not he is the greatest South African player of all time. Between the years 1927 to 1943, he won the Durban Championship on no less than twelve occasions - more than any other player to date.

(We are indebted for much of the foregoing information to an article in the 1950 South African Chess Federation Year Book based on information supplied by Bob Earp.)

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