

Andrew Finch (1920-2018)

Some of you will probably remember Andrew, who died on 9th January, at the great age of 97, having enjoyed an interesting and productive life. He belonged to only one club, Wigston, which he joined shortly after his retirement in 1981. Prior to that he had not played chess competitively and so did well to reach a grade of approx. 150 in his best season. For over 15 years he was a stalwart for his club, at which he was liked and respected, becoming particularly friendly with Anthony Morley, Andy's father, both being talented musicians. He played mainly in the 2nd and 3rd teams once he had settled into league chess, and held his own at that level.

Andrew was a real enthusiast for the game and also took part in congresses, both weekend and one day, often in the company of Ron and Mary Jones. He won a quick play Major at Peterborough when over 70, and last played just before 2000. In the later years he still liked to have the occasional game at home, and looked at chess problems. The late Ted Williams, of Thurnby and Oadby, visited him regularly, as I did from 2012, after Ted left the county.

Although Andrew gained a good deal of pleasure from chess in his older age, earlier he had achieved more in other aspects of his life, which is why I think he merits an extended tribute.

He was a gifted linguist, being awarded a 1st in Modern Languages at Oxford University, and pursued a career as a teacher of French and German, at first in the private sector. However, Andrew was drawn towards the greater challenge of the state system, in which significant changes were about to happen, and he was opposed to the elitist aspect of public and grammar schools. In 1960 he was appointed headmaster of a new, very small, secondary school, Longslade, at Birstall. Apparently this was the first comprehensive school in Leics.

Andrew was entrusted with this vital position by Stewart Mason, the then Director of Education, an indication of how highly he was regarded, and he proved to be up to the task. Mason was a pioneer of comprehensive education and developed a model used nationally. He and his successor Andrew Fairbairn strongly encouraged the arts, which was much to Andrew's taste. When he retired in 1981 Longslade College was thriving, having over 1100 pupils.

Despite his vocation in education, and Andrew wrote and lectured widely on the subject after retirement, he came close to moving in an entirely different direction, due to his overwhelming love for classical music, which even chess never surpassed! His mother, who was Serbian, had been considered a child prodigy of the piano and good measure of this ability was passed on to Andrew who was an extremely capable pianist. Perhaps that is an understatement.

In fact in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, before he moved to Leicester, Andrew was half of a piano duo which performed semi-professionally in well over 100 concerts and recitals, mainly in the South of England. For a time he and his partner were pupils of the outstanding pianist and world renowned duettist Cyril Smith (not the discredited MP), who considered they had genuine prospects of success as a professional duo and was prepared to give them

his backing. Circumstances, including Smith's serious illness at a crucial time, prevented it, and education was the beneficiary.

Andrew composed classical pieces and wrote poetry. Whilst he was not a heavyweight in the latter form, he excelled also in the written word and had 2 small books of poems published. His verses are entertaining and thought provoking, full of his wit and wisdom.

In addition to his exceptional mind, which remained remarkably sharp sound almost until the end, he was, more importantly, a man of genuine kindness and humour, sometimes whimsical. All of these qualities enabled him to be useful and happy in old age and make his long years of retirement unusually fruitful. He will be much missed by those who had the pleasure of knowing him.

With thanks to Brian Foreman for this obituary.