

Robert Graham Wade, an appreciation.



On May 20th, 1919, Thomas Graham Wade, aged 27, Sergeant in the NZ Expeditionary Force, repatriated with honour from war-time service in Egypt, Gallipoli and France, married Amy Lilian Neave, aged 21, in South Dunedin. A New Zealander of Scots and English descent, his family was Graham from Montrose. The family name, Wade, came from Marshall George Wade, the soldier and engineer who led the Hanoverian forces against the Scots at the time of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion and was immortalised in the original third verse of the British national anthem:

*Lord, grant that Marshal Wade,
May by thy mighty aid,
Victory bring.
May he sedition hush and like a torrent rush,
Rebellious Scots to crush,
God save the King.*

Robert Graham Wade, known in the Scots manner to his family as Robin, and later to his many friends as Bob, was their first child, born April 10th, 1921, at Dunedin. Over the next few years he was joined by sisters, Lilian, Agnes, Betty, June, his brother Ted and finally by his youngest sister Amy. The family lived for a number of years at Portobello. At that time, Portobello was a scattered community of about 150 people with three shops and a pub on the Otago Peninsula. Bob attended Portobello Primary School, a small country school, finished “dux” or top of class, and then attended the King Edward Technical High School at Stuart Street in Dunedin.¹

I first met Bob in December 1971, when he autographed my copy of *The Closed Ruy Lopez*; however, I did not get to know him well until the early 1980s when he played in an Athenaeum team I captained. At that time Bob lived in Blackheath in a house owned by Mrs Phillips, the wife of the former British Champion Alan Phillips. Also living there was Hilary Thomas who wrote *The Complete Games of Mikhail Tal*. At that time Bob invariably answered the phone with the abrupt “Wade!” which was affectionately mimicked by the less respectful players of the younger generation. His telephone manner did mellow with the passage of time.

Bob was a generous man, always willing to help, at no benefit to himself. When I was approached by West London Chess Club just before their centenary for information on their club's history I was able to tell them that Vera Menchik and Sir George Thomas had been members. But I added: “this is obviously known to you, if you want I can approach someone who can provide something more worthwhile.” Bob was duly happy to oblige.

If I can summarise a man in one adjective, that adjective would be “kind”. Bob travelled up and down, pretty well anywhere, to promote the game. It didn't matter to him whether advocacy of chess involved a trip to Jordan, South Africa or merely a south London school. When eighty Bob came down to muck in when the British Chess Federation moved premises to Battle, the site of the famous Battle of Hastings.

Never snobbish, Bob treated both grandmaster and amateur with seriousness and respect. He played Fischer three times, as well as many other leading players such as Uhlmann, Smyslov, Tal (“the

temperamental Wade”²) and Kortschnoi. It was amusing to hear Bob dismiss Kholmov, a world class player; but then the New Zealander did play well against the Soviet. One time I annotated a game of Bob's against Kortschnoi for a club newsletter. Rather than deride my notes, Bob let me have a copy of Pachman's, tactfully leaving me to work out that they were rather superior to mine. Bob was looking for a critical examination of what was happening. It was not good enough to say: “Black has an advantage”, the why and the how counted for more.

To Bob chess was an inclusive game, anyone who wanted to play should be afforded the opportunity to do so. He helped several London clubs in their early days, including Mushrooms and Drunken Knights, who were vociferously supported by Bob when they first applied to join the London Chess League. Bob has even been given credit when it has not been due! It has been written that Bob instituted chess at Morley College³. Not so, I attended lessons there in the early 1970s, when they were given by Daniel Castello (“Rook on the third, king on the queening square”⁴). Bob took over, along with Les Blackstock, after Daniel's death in his nineties.

Bob supported the game at all levels, including county chess. He first turned out for Middlesex in 1948 and played regularly from 1953 onwards. His notable opponents included Jonathan Penrose, Frank Parr, ARB Thomas, WA Fairhurst, PH Clarke, Gerald Abrahams, Sir Stuart Milner-Barry, John Littlewood, RD Keene, Max Fuller, George Botterill, Nigel Povah and Harriet Hunt. I believe his last game for Middlesex was in 2001, after which the strain of travelling proved too much even for this most enthusiastic of competitors. Thus he played more than fifty years for the county. He turned out one hundred and forty-seven times, at least, over this period. In the 1970s Bob was Middlesex President, which has never been a purely honorary title.



The victorious Middlesex team of 1979.

One of Bob's complaints about British chess was the poor standard of endgame technique, an opinion he held to his dying day. Thus I was privileged to see Bob win and draw many an inferior ending. Yet this view also revealed a certain dogmatism; one time when I had the pleasure of playing Bob I knew he would exchange queens, even though at that point it was not to his advantage.⁵

Bob thought deeply and creatively about the game. Many will know of his contributions to opening theory

in the Advance French (...Bd7-b5), the Meran (Bb7) and the unorthodox ...d6 followed by ...Bg4. In old age he came up with an early ...b5 in the Advanced French; sceptical, I could not refute it when I quickly analysed it with him. I was delighted to see Bob win with it in a serious game against a good amateur player in a league match. Bob placed a premium on piece activity, current and potential; a useless, lazily placed piece was anathema to him, particularly the queen's bishop; all the Wade systems are associated with the early development of that piece.⁶

It would be wrong to suggest Bob had no interests outside chess. He had more opportunities than most people to talk to foreign players and dignitaries. I remember an informed conversation we had before a county match when the Rumanian dictator Ceausescu was demolishing traditional villages in Transylvania in favour of hideous modern constructions: neither of us approved. We also had discussions on the Great War and other subjects in which we shared an interest. It would, however, be fair to suggest that playing the game was Bob's greatest love: far more so than acting as an arbiter, which he did out of duty rather than pleasure.

Bob had an excellent sense of humour and would have enjoyed the story I heard from Athenaeum Chess Club member Richard Wright. I have no idea whether it is true, but it certainly deserves to be. All too few women play chess; thus it was a refreshing sight to see a young woman attend Bob's lectures at Morley College. Every session she would go home with a different member for "further study". After several weekly lessons she had studied with every attendee save two: "I'm too old, what's wrong with you?" asked Bob of the married Richard. A further instance of Bob's playful sense is given in the notes to his name.⁷

A friendly man, Bob lent me his copy of Robert Traver's *Anatomy of a Murder*, which I returned a few days later, having read it at one sitting. At first I did not fully understand the book's significance to him, but I did later gain an inkling. The book possibly cost Bob a win against Kortschnoi in Havana in 1963, for he lost a night's sleep reading it before their game. As well as being linked to this memorable game, the book may have brought back to Bob memories of his time as a Civil Servant in New Zealand. He had had a small role in the drafting of legal documents, a training that proved useful when he later served on FIDE's rules committee. His curiosity may have been piqued by the intricate legal manoeuvres recorded in this book; and the manner in which truth can be transmogrified into useless ballast, or something worse. In real life Bob was to suffer from circular proof and misinterpretation. The one thing lacking would be solid evidence.⁸

Bob tried to be scrupulously fair to all sides, not something that was necessarily welcome in the heat of the battle. But an active administrator and arbiter cannot avoid controversy. At the height of the Cold War, in 1953, he was a member of the FIDE qualification committee which rejected Fyodor Bohatirchuk's application for the title of International Master. The Ukrainian Bohatirchuk was detested in Soviet circles because he had worked for the German authorities when living under the Nazi occupation in WWII. When the Red Army pushed the Germans out he had chosen to join the retreat westwards; he eventually settled in Canada. The Canadian federation mishandled the application, not even sending a delegate to the FIDE congress to counter predictable Soviet arguments that he should be rejected on political grounds. The Canadians based the claim on the only two international tournaments in which Bohatirchuk had competed by the time of his application, at Moscow in 1925 and 1935. Considering the strength of the opposition (Capablanca finished third in 1925 and fourth in 1935) his performances were quite impressive, but in neither event did he score above 50%. Bob suggested that the correct procedure was to make the claim on the strength of Bohatirchuk's performances in Soviet Championships; but it is not hard to understand why this was not done in the first instance. Bob made clear that the claim was rejected on technical, not political, grounds.

The rejection created a storm in Canadian chess circles where Bob had already given offence by suggesting that Canada should cease to be a separate FIDE zone and unite with that of the US. In the spirit of Senator Joe McCarthy, the Canadian Vice-President denounced Bob as a lackey of the Soviets and a closet Communist. His letter to the December 1952 *Canadian Chess Chat* was subsequently reprinted in the February 1953 issue of *CHESS* magazine. The right wing editor BH Wood, who had served with Bob within FIDE, dismissed the allegation⁹. In the April issue Bob presented his own side, he specifically denied being a communist.¹⁰ Unfortunately, these preposterous allegations dogged Bob ever after. It cannot be stressed enough that politics was not what Bob was about, chess was his great love.

What a lot of people did not, and some still do not, understand is that Bob's respect for Soviet chess training methods¹¹ did not extend to respect for the Soviet system as a whole. The Soviets produced the world's best players and Bob was ahead of his time in seeing how this was achieved. His political views were left of centre, but certainly never communist, never mind Communist: unfortunately, these

subtleties are often misunderstood. Bob did once have a regular column in the widely circulated *Daily Worker*, which was passed on to him by William Winter, who, unlike Bob, was a Communist. This eked out Bob's earnings from other chess related activities such as teaching; it did not point to his political views. Winter was firmly of the view that national chess columns should be written by chess professionals; he objected to strong amateurs, such as Alexander, earning money they did not need at the expense of struggling chess professionals. The column continued until the *Daily Worker* could no longer afford the luxury of a paid chess columnist. Bob never again obtained the financial cushion afforded to a national chess journalist.¹²

The life of a full time chess master has never been an easy one in Great Britain; it required an asceticism that Bob possessed in full measure. This self-discipline was expressed in an excellent track record when it came to the production and writing of quality chess books. For Bob, as editor of Batsford's *Contemporary Chess Openings* series, had a hand not just in those he himself authored or co-authored, but countless others too, including a small role in perhaps the most overrated chess book ever written: Koto's *Think Like a Grandmaster*. Bob wrote an acclaimed account of the 1951 World Championship between Botvinnik and Bronstein jointly with William Winter; other well received books included *Soviet Chess* (published 1968); *The World Chess Championship* jointly with Gligoric (published 1972, it should be noted that the annotations were by Jimmy Adams, Kevin O'Connell, Les Blackstock, Leonard Pickett, George Botterill, John Moles and Tony Swift. Gligoric dropped out of the 1986 edition in which Bob collaborated with Ray Keene and Andrew Whiteley); *The Closed Ruy Lopez* with Les Blackstock and Philip J Booth (although dated, because it was written before the invention of the Zaitsev defence, there is still much good material present); and *The Games of Robert J. Fischer* written with Kevin O'Connell (the book whose publication just prior to the 1972 match between Fischer and Spassky ruffled the American's feathers).

Making a living out of playing, teaching, writing and acting as an arbiter did not leave much in the way of a disposable income. So I was astonished to see how generous, in monetary terms, Bob had been to the Athenaeum his main chess club; to which he had been introduced by Daniel Castello in 1953. He gave so much of his time free that British, indeed world, chess will forever be in his debt. I count myself fortunate to be the recipient of gifts from him, including one of only ten copies of a booklet he produced. I was lucky enough, too, to be invited to both of Bob's eightieth birthday parties; at least I assume there were only two, for given his popularity there may well have been others.

Bob's collection of chess materials was vast; it included a signed copy of the book of the World Championship match between Lasker and Capablanca. Bob also showed me a book signed by Vyacheslav Ragozin, he was obliging enough to agree with my clumsy: *an erratic, but talented, player*. Many contributed to the build up of his library, best known, of course, is the role played by the publisher Batsford Books; however, Leonard Barden, too, contributed a lot of volumes.

Bob always lived for the present and the future; he did not dwell on the past. I can accept that he spent his final hours plotting an overseas trip. Bob was always aware of his limitations, as he advanced in years he tried to adjust to his reduced stamina by playing quickly, although he had never been a slow player. What upset him was the suggestion that he should not be taken seriously because of his age: as I told Bob the penultimate time I saw him, he was very much *compos mentis*: he expressed his thanks and wished others would recognise this. I never hesitated to ask Bob for advice when occasion demanded it.

Who could not like Bob, once one knew him? He had so many friends that it was hardly surprising that his last competitive game was played on 18th November against one of these, Jim Stevenson. Bob had been expected to play a London League game for the Athenaeum at home on 26th November. There was consternation when he did not appear; for he always arrived early. In the more than thirty years that I knew Bob, I can only recall him defaulting once, and that through no fault of his. We must have sat on adjacent, or nearby, boards dozens of times, if not hundreds.

I should like to express my thanks to Andrew Whiteley, Jim Stevenson and, most especially, Bob's authorised biographer Paul McKeown for their help in the writing of this tribute.

Simon Spivack.

Bob Wade, born Dunedin, New Zealand 10th April, 1921;

died London 29th November. 2008.

- 1 The first two paragraphs and the verse are a direct quote from the unpublished, but authorised, biography of Bob written by Paul McKeown. These words were seen and approved by Bob himself. Hopefully these will scotch the bizarre alternative suggestion for Bob's middle name. If the reader won't grant this, then he may care to look at the following image of Bob's 1946 passport. My explanation for this tall tale is that either Bob was misheard, or that his sense of humour was in play.



It should be noted that the quoted verse has never officially been part of the UK national anthem. Some versions include "God" rather "Lord". Understandably, this verse rankles in parts of Scotland to this day.

- 2 See page 451, game number 86 between Tal and Wade, played in Tallinn in 1971; the actual comment can be found in the note to move 13 on page 452. The book in question: the UK edition of *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal*, by Mikhail Tal, RHM Press (US), Pitman (UK), ISBN 0 89058 0278 (RHM), 273 014 90 3 (Pitman).
- 3 See, for instance, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article5268937.ece> . A lot of the obituaries published contain errors, including that of TWIC.
- 4 I have never forgotten Daniel Castello's formula for rook and pawn against rook, the key introductory concept to Philidor's position.
- 5 Andrew Whiteley has kindly given me the following rueful note:

At the British Championship in my home town of Oxford in 1967 I reached a won ending against Bob, but he lured me into taking a second pawn, leading to a drawn bishops of opposite colour ending. The local paper reported "Whiteley failed to win two pawns up ..." The headline was simply "Whiteley fails in Oxford chess".

- 6 Many thanks to Jim Stevenson for pointing this out.
- 7 See note 1 above.
- 8 Getting Bob to open up was never easy. I was impressed at how much John Saunders the editor of *BCM* was able to coax out of Bob in his highly recommended 1999 interview. It can be downloaded from: <http://bcmchess.co.uk/news/bcm1999-12wadeinterview.pdf> . Should this link be inoperative, it may be worth logging onto the BCM website at <http://bcmchess.co.uk/> and searching from there.

It cannot be stressed enough that Bob expected his interlocutors to think for themselves. If I had asked him for an explanation of his extolling of *Anatomy of a Murder*, I'm confident all I'd have received was an enigmatic smile. My account of this book's importance to him could be off beam.

9 *CHESS* readers will recall a correspondence in *CHESS* way back in 1949 on the subject of Bohatyrchuk, to which he himself contributed. He apparently joined General Vlasov, who fought with the Nazis against the Russians and it seems perfectly natural, therefore, for Communists patriotic to their own regimes to regard him as a renegade. This being so, the stage was set for an ugly scene when his candidature was put forward and it is difficult to see what the F.I.D.E. assembly could do but shelve the question.

Bearing in mind how intolerant a crusade Communism is, it seems to me that the Russians have abused F.I.D.E. for propaganda purposes less than any similar organisation I know. Exaggerated deference is paid to them, however, even allowing for their pre-eminence, qualitative and quantitative, in play and organisation. ...

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As for poor R. G. Wade, I don't think he is a Communist, even though he now has a column in the Daily Worker. He is suffering the usual unfortunate fate of the fellow who tries to remain "in with everybody"!

BH Wood.

_Chess, vol. 18, no. 209, February 1953, pp. 88-89.

10 *Dear Mr. Wood,*

The letter of Mr. G. G. Ferguson, vice-president of Chess Federation of Canada, to the "Canadian Chess Chat", which you reproduce in February's "CHESS", is based on completely wrong facts. First it is wrongly assumed that I am a Communist or fellow-traveller.

The two subjects discussed are taken from a newsletter – part of a series that the editor of "Canadian Chess Chat" asked me to make a regular feature. As no Canadian representative was present at the F.I.D.E. Congress last September, I gave a résumé of the business which I thought Canada was specially interested in.

Canada had nominated Bohatyrchuk for the title of International Master. This nomination was discussed by the F.I.D.E. qualifications commission twice. Ragozin, representing the U.S.S.R., objected to the granting of the title, pointing out that Bohatyrchuk was regarded as a traitor to his country and to the war-time allies. That is one side of the case. Personally I think that it is irrelevant and outside the jurisdiction of an international organisation concerned with chess. If Bohatyrchuk had a clear claim to the title of international master, the Soviet Union's objections would have to be overruled. There cannot be the least doubt that Bohatyrchuk is far stronger than many who have been granted the title of international master. The weakness of Canada's case is that the title is granted for international results. Bohatyrchuk participated in only two genuine international events and did not have impressive results due to the fact that these two events were colossally strong. For instance, if my memory serves me right, Bohatyrchuk was 11th at Moscow, 1925 – but what a field above him!

There is a resolution passed at the last F.I.D.E. meeting that claims for the master titles based entirely on pre-war record will not be considered after the next congress at Zurich early this September. Canada has to decide this year whether Bohatyrchuk's record internationally warrants the F.I.D.E. taking a vote on the question in which the voters will be split into three groups—politically against, technically against and technically for. I hope that no one votes for Bohatyrchuk's claim simply on political grounds.

I have few records with me as I meander around various Scottish clubs, so I cannot consult Bohatyrchuk's in the U.S.S.R. But if he participated in three U.S.S.R. championship finals prior to the F.I.D.E. 1950 Congress, he automatically is entitled to the title of international master.

It should be wrong for anyone to assume the views expressed by a delegate to a F.I.D.E. meeting without

actually being present or having consulted the minutes. Some of your readers will know that the late grandmaster, Bogoljubov, was the subject of a similar controversy to that of Bohatyrchuk. Bogoljubov's international record was one of the finest. It was I who, when out-voted at a qualifications commission meeting at the 1951 F.I.D.E. Congress, introduced the dispute to the general assembly and forced a vote. It was I, with the consent of the Australian Chess Federation and New Zealand Chess Association, who, in 1951, nominated Bogoljubov for the title of grandmaster. In Kotov's report, on that Congress, written in the U.S.S.R. chess magazine, there was written "that Wade is not fit to be a delegate to the F.I.D.E." It seems that at least Kotov and Mr. Ferguson agree on this.

If the U.S.S.R. introduce ideas at F.I.D.E. meetings that will strengthen chess internationally – such as some of their financial proposals – and I remain a delegate to the F.I.D.E., I wish to be left with the discretion to support them just as I will oppose them if their attitude is too nationalistic. Where U.S.S.R. players play good chess I wish to be left with a power to appreciate unwarping by political hysterics. The U.S.S.R. masters play good chess and possess good chess manners. Where I have written U.S.S.R. in this last paragraph, the names of most other countries could be written.

- RG Wade in a letter to Chess, vol. 18, no. 211, April 1953, p. 132

11 It was a new concept for a modern country to have sport organised by the state with its access to money and its power as employer. In the early days the band of organisers overcame many difficulties by their sheer dedication. Gradually the organisation grew. It hurt at first. There was a nagging conflict between those who wanted to play chess for enjoyment or as an escape from reality and those who wanted chess developed within the new educational and sporting framework and who saw that this entailed constant drive. The state, in return for its money, wanted evidence of new or more massive events and growth in every year. The state also developed the mass media, like the young pioneers movement, whereby the young between nine and sixteen could attend specialist centres and receive tuition in chess and dozens of other recreational or vocational activities. The chess organisations provided the teachers.

Similar organisation under the prevailing social system in England in 1967 is possible. No Communist government is needed. Local boroughs are able to provide and pay teachers if there is a proven demand. Courses for the teachers can be available on demand. Chess is very popular amongst children of school age, but the needed drive and tuition from adults is sadly lacking. The standards of teaching chess vary widely but in general are poor.

From Soviet Chess by R.G. Wade, outline chapter.

12 Paul McKeown was kind enough to type the following, amongst other things, for this tribute.

'Last but by no means least in the category of the chess professional's work is newspaper reporting and the editorship of chess columns. All over the continent this has always been regarded as the special preserve of the professional master, and one of his principal sources of revenue. All the leading European newspapers carry columns edited by the leading players, which are, in consequence, a real benefit to the student. In England the case is vastly different. "Why is it" the Belgian master Koltanowski remarked to me, on the occasion of his first visit to this country, "Why is it that in England you give all ze chess columns to ze people who cannot play ze chess?" and I could only echo sadly, Why? When I joined the professional ranks in the middle of the twenties the situation with regard to chess reporting could only be described as disgraceful.'"

This was taken from William Winter's memoirs, written shortly before his death in 1955, but serialised by BH Wood in Chess, vol. 28, this particular extract taken from Chess, Vol. 28, No. 424-5, January 26th 1963, p. 111.

The point it illustrates was that William Winter was very concerned that a chess column should be written by a chess professional, who should therefore gain some degree of financial security from it. He had collaborated with Bob in writing 'World Chess Championship 1951', W. Winter & R. G. Wade, Turnstile Press, 1951 and was very happy with Bob's skill as a writer, editor and chess analyst. Indeed that book had received some excellent reviews, viz. e.g. BCM 1952, p. 13 (G. Abrahams).

Nothing to do with Communism and everything to do with the professional courtesy of one chess master towards another.

Bob edited the column in the Daily Worker from 1952, when he became British Champion, until 1957, when events in Hungary had made Soviet style "socialism" intensely unpopular in Britain, with the consequence that the "Daily Worker", having lost a large part of its readership, could no longer afford to keep Bob as its only paid columnist.

The columns themselves were entirely devoted to chess and completely non-political.

Often they were concerned with the development of chess amongst school children, such as:

"Myrtle Barnes, of Bromley (Kent) county technical school, won the British girls' championship at Hastings. The Birmingham Easter congress had a record entry of 221. The newly instituted British junior championship was won by D.F. Griffiths, of Birmingham, with 6½ points from nine games. B. H. Wood (Sutton Coldfield) retained the senior Midlands championship title. The junior title was won by W. Powell, of Staffordshire. The Southern Counties junior championship was won by J. T. Farrand...."

The Daily Worker, Chess by R.G. Wade (British champion), 15 April 1953.

Typical other columns were concerned with the British championships, Hastings, other strong national tournaments, the London League, National Club Championships, the BCF Counties Championships, the national correspondence championships, all often illustrated with games played by himself, other well known players, and sometimes games by the most obscure of amateur players. He also dealt with the Olympiads, Interzonal and Candidates tournaments, World Championship matches and other international tournaments. An innovation of his column in The Daily Worker was to include at least one position in most columns with a puzzle to be solved, sometimes with a small prize, something that William Winter had not been able to achieve. These positions illustrated openings, middlegames, endgames, problems, studies....

Nary a word regarding Communism - honi soit qui mal y pense.