



Double Agents

On the home page of the Russian website ChessPro.ru I saw a picture of the English correspondence chess grandmaster Adrian Hollis. It illustrates, as I found out with the help of a computer translation, an article by Vladimir Neishtadt about the notorious spy ring known at first as the Cambridge Three, later as the Cambridge Four and even, depending on how serious one takes subsequent allegations, as the Cambridge Five or Six.

These were men holding high positions in the British intelligence service who turned out to have actually worked for the Soviet Union. But what did the picture of Adrian Hollis do there? Was he also a double agent? It seemed highly unlikely, as for his whole professional life he had taught Classics at Oxford University. Not to leave the reader in suspense I hasten to declare that Adrian Hollis is completely innocent.

There are several anecdotes about chessplayers who ran into trouble because their books or notes were suspicious to the authorities, written as they are in an incomprehensible code. An often repeated story has it that Steinitz was arrested in the US during his two-game cable match against Chigorin in 1891. Of course this story was investigated by his biographer Kurt Landsberger, but in the absence of official police records from the period he could neither affirm nor disprove it.

Another supposed victim of a spy hunt was the Russian player Moisei Elyashov, who was present as a reporter at the tournament in Mannheim in 1914, when it was disbanded at the outbreak of World War I. This seems a more plausible story.

No doubt exists about the fact that in 2001 an inmate of a prison in Oregon was cruelly denied the pleasure of studying Eric Schiller's book *Standard Chess Openings*. He had ordered it from the publisher, but it was returned by the prison officials because it might endanger the security of the institution, with the simple explanation: "Contains code throughout." If you go to Tim Krabbé's *Chess Curiosities* website and type 'Schiller' in the search window, you'll find the amusing notification received by Cardoza Publications.

It is well-known that there were chess masters who were really involved in espionage. Alexander, Milner Barry and Golombek were part of the group that during World War II broke the German code, the first two holding high administrative positions. The most brilliant of these code breakers was the mathematician Alan Turing, who also played chess, but apparently not very well. Turing's main contribution to chess, apart from inventing the computer, seems to

COLUMNISTS

Dutch Treat

Hans Ree



have been round-the house-chess, in which a player can think about a move as long as the time that the opponent needs to run around the house. Then he starts running himself, while the opponent is thinking, and so on.

Neishtadt's article is not about these fine men who made a crucial contribution to the British war effort, but about a chess master who for some time was suspected of being a double agent, a Soviet mole in the British intelligence service.

This was Graham Mitchell, who was an international master in correspondence chess and until his retirement in 1963 the deputy of Roger Hollis, father of Adrian Hollis and Director General of MI5, the British intelligence service.

The notorious Cambridge four were Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, who fled to Moscow already in 1951, their boss Kim Philby, who came to Moscow in 1963, and the art historian Anthony Blunt, who in 1964 confessed to have been a Soviet agent, though in his case this became public knowledge only much later.

At the time some MI5 agents were convinced that there must be other Soviet moles in the organisation who had not yet been exposed. One of the mole hunters was Peter Wright, who in 1987 would publish the bestselling book *Spycatcher* about his career in the intelligence service.

At first the suspicions of Wright and his colleagues were directed both at Mitchell and at his boss Roger Hollis; later they were concentrated on Hollis.

Possibly under pressure from this investigation Mitchell retired from his function in 1963, Hollis in 1965. In 1974 an official inquiry of the allegations against Hollis found no proof against him and in 1981 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared to the House of Commons that Roger Hollis had not been a Soviet agent. Peter Wright remained unconvinced and in 1987 in his book *Spycatcher* he was still making a case against Hollis as the fifth member of the Cambridge gang.

But whatever one may think of this - I have no opinion of my own - the question remains why the picture of Adrian Hollis figures so prominently on the ChessPro home page. His connection to this spy story is tenuous. He was the son of Roger Hollis and in the book *British Chess* (1983) he writes that he was introduced to correspondence chess by Graham Mitchell, but that is all.

The reason might simply be that he had to stand in because no picture of Graham Mitchell, the real subject of the ChessPro article, was available. There is no picture of him in *British Chess* and when I tried a google search I could not find one either. Traditionally members of the intelligence community were not generous with photo opportunities.

Here is a correspondence game by Mitchell, which was annotated in *British Chess* by a fellow worker in British intelligence, Hugh Alexander.

C.E. Lord • Graham Mitchell
BCCA Championship

1944-1945

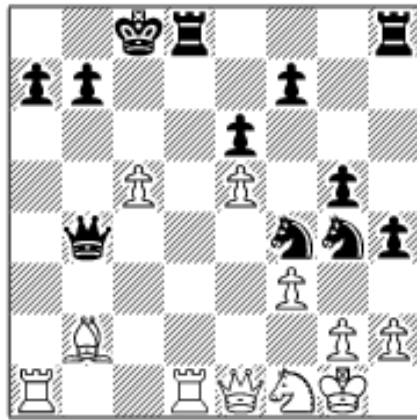
1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4 4. Nxe4 Bf5 5. Ng3 Bg6 6. Nf3 Nd7 7. Bd3 e6 8. 0-0 Ngf6 9. b3 Qc7 10. Bb2 0-0-0 11. c4 Bd6 12. Qe2 Bxd3 13. Qxd3 h5 14. Rfd1 c5 15. Qe2 h4 16. Nf1 Nh5 17. Ne5 Ndf6 18. a3 Nf4 19. Qe3 g5 As a result of White's timid play Black has obtained a good position. According to Alexander, White probably is already lost, which seems exaggerated to me.

20. b4 But this is a grave mistake after which Black gets a clear advantage.

20...Bxe5 21. dxe5 21. Qxe5 would lead to an immediate defeat after 21...Qxe5 22. dxe5 Rxd1 23. Rxd1 Ne2+ 24. Kh1 Ne4, which wins a rook because of the threat 25...Nf2 mate.

21...Qc6 22. f3 The best defense was 22. Qf3, though the endgame would be bad for White.

22...Ng4 23. Qe1 cxb4 24. axb4 Qb6+ 25. c5 Qxb4



White cannot take the queen because of the nice mate with two knights as in the note to White's 21th move: 26. Qxb4 Ne2+ 27. Kh1 Nf2 mate.

26. Ba3 Rxd1 27. Bxb4 Rxa1 28. Qe4 Rd8 29. c6 Rdd1 This gives White a chance to escape. There was a forced win with 29...Rxf1 + 30. Kxf1 Rd1+ 31. Be1 Nd3

30. cxb7+ Kd7 31. b8N+ White misses his chance. There was a draw, indicated by

Mitchell himself, by 31. Be1 Rxe1 32. Qd4+ Nd5 33. Qxa1 Rxa1 34. b8Q. This is not a simple variation, but the computer finds it almost instantly. It makes you realise how much correspondence chess has changed by the computer. Mistakes are still made of course, but the kind of tactical mistakes that we see here can easily be avoided.

31...Kd8



White has three attacking pieces directed at Black's king and it is fully understandable that on his previous move he still would have thought that he might arrange at least a perpetual, e.g., by 32. Nc6+. Again, the computer indicates almost instantly that there is nothing to be had for White in this position.

32. Be7+ Kxe7 33. Qb4+ Ke8 34. Qb5+ Kf8 35. fxe4 Nd3 White resigned.



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