



## COLUMNISTS

*The Kibitzer*

Tim Harding



**The Write Move**  
by Tim Harding

## Sir George Thomas: The Early Years

I decided to write about the early years of the English chess master Sir George Thomas (1881-1972) since a book of his games just came out, and having seen Sir George when I was only sixteen years old, this struck a chord. Probably much of what I have to say about his early playing career will come as a surprise to nearly all readers who know anything about Sir George – including the book’s author. For your information, I am referring to *The Chess Games of Sir George Alan Thomas*, ed. Roger Leslie Paige (Exposure Publishing, Liskeard, 2005) but I don’t really recommend buying it, as you will see.

The book is primarily a game collection of his mature years as a chess master, so it is very light on his early years and biography. I knew nothing about the author until I saw this book, but I gather that he is a veteran Hampshire chess player, who fairly recently moved to Scotland. Mr. Paige also acknowledges some assistance from renowned chess researcher Tony Gillam in locating little-known games.

Several chess masters are known to have developed their playing skills primarily by correspondence play in their early years. Alexander Alekhine and Paul Keres are the best-known examples, and, in recent times, the English grandmaster Mark Hebden came to prominence when he won the first Grand Open tournament of the British Postal Chess Federation.

Two years ago, I discovered that F. D. Yates had played an important correspondence tournament during his formative years (not mentioned in the posthumously-produced book of his games). In the case of Sir George Thomas, Yates’ contemporary and great rival (for twenty years), postal play was even more important, but you will not get any inkling of that from Paige, except that the very first game in the book was played by post: Thomas-F.Pickering, and it just says “Correspondence England, 1902,” with source *Sunday Times* 19/1/1902 p.8.

This actually was played on top board in a match between the readers of two chess columns, in a competition arranged by the British Chess Company for teams of players representing such columns. Pickering (of Forest Hill, London) was playing for the *Morning Post* and Thomas for the *Dublin*

*Evening Mail*. (The pairings were printed in the *Mail* on 23 November 1901.) However, I don't think Thomas ever lived in Dublin; his address is given in Southsea, as usual. The column by Thomas and Frideswide Rowland was well-established as one of the best weekly columns, and had quite a few British readers. The game was first published in the *Mail* of 28 December 1901, so it had probably started quite some time before the pairings were listed in the paper. I won't give the Pickering game here, as it is widely available. It was also printed in *The Chess Chronicle*, 1902 page 43 (that was the last throes or life-after-death of the old *Chess Player's Chronicle*).

The book begins with a very short biographical introduction and chess career record. The latter is reliable, for all I know, but the former is decidedly skimpy. The Thomas coat of arms, by the way, is not in the book. I found it in *Debrett's*; the family motto says, "Honesty is the best policy."



My first impression was that Paige seemed unaware of (or saw no reason to mention) the fact, quite interesting I think, that George Thomas (born on 14 June 1881) was brought up in Constantinople (now Istanbul), where his parents lived until about 1895. The sometimes-unreliable Wikipedia online encyclopaedia gives his birthplace as "Therapia, Turkey," and I also found a web page by Bill Wall that states Thomas was born near Istanbul and provides quite a few facts not in the Paige book. While I would not accept any information from the Internet without checking it (especially as I have seen errors in other Bill Wall pages), there is a *prima facie* plausibility about this, and Wall also says (infuriatingly, as usual, with no references) that Thomas "entered several problem solving contests" in 1894, and that in 1896

he defeated Emanuel Lasker in a simul. The latter is certainly true; I saw it confirmed in the *Dublin Evening Mail* of 21 June 1896.

The sixth baronet Sir George Sidney Meade Thomas (1847-1918), the chess-player's father, was Cambridge-educated. Perhaps he was a diplomat (or spy?) of some kind in Turkey, but the family seems to have been wealthy enough to support several persons in style, without having to work for a living. On return from abroad, the family apparently went to live in the Portsmouth area, but perhaps only after a period in London. Again, this is something it might be possible to find out from reference works of the time. The first baronet, Sir George Thomas (ca. 1695-1774), was a planter and colonial governor from the Caribbean island of Antigua, and has an entry in the "Oxford Dictionary of National Biography."

That is where one should probably go for the best biographical information on "our" Sir George. That entry, revised by Margaret Whitehead, was written by Harry Golombek, who probably had some opportunities to check the details with the subject. This article states that Thomas was "born in the British consulate in Constantinople," and that his mother taught him chess when he was only four years old. The future Sir George, Golombek also informs us, was a wall-board demonstration boy during the great 1895 Hastings international tournament.

Since writing most of this article, I heard from the author, who said he had read the *O.D.N.B.* article, but didn't want to "just parrot stuff," since he was really trying to make a game collection, not a proper biography. I don't like to just "parrot stuff" either, but with this kind of research I check as many secondary sources as possible, where primary sources are unavailable, and try to weigh up who is likely to be right when there are conflicts of evidence. I do think a little more personal colour would have helped in this case, since Sir George's background was evidently somewhat unusual.

George Thomas's mother, who Paige correctly identifies as the Lady Edith Margaret Thomas (nee Foster), won the Ladies tournament at Hastings 1895 and also played in the first ladies international in London 1897. I wrote about these details in the history of women's chess in some Kibitzer articles last year, which can be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#). Less well-known is that a Miss Thomas (apparently one of George's sisters) also played at Hastings 1895 in the second (lower) ladies' tournament, scoring four and a half points from seven games to finish in a tie for second place. So evidently George had good competition at home from an early age, not only from his mother.

Lady Thomas was also involved with the Ladies Chess Club in London, although living in Portsmouth probably made this difficult. Paige says nothing about that. When they first came back to England, they lived closer

to London, judging from this paragraph in the book of the 1895 Hastings tournament.

“Lady THOMAS, EDITH M., of the Manor of Marston, Beds., who won the first prize of the Ladies’ Major Tournament, besides being a good chessist, is an expert musician and good singer, late pupil of Sir John Goss. She lived for some years with her husband, Sir Geo. Thomas, Bart., at Constantinople, but now resides in this country, and is sometimes to be seen at the Ladies’ Chess Club, London.”

Paige does say that George Thomas joined the Portsmouth Chess Club in 1896; presumably that is when the family moved there, but to say his chess career started in the south of England may be a bit misleading. For all we know, he may have played in Turkey, if they had a club of some kind there. At least he played with family members and maybe helped his mother solve chess problems; her name appears as a regular solver in the *Illustrated London News* as early as 1888 (and I may have overlooked her name in previous years as the print for those solver lists is quite small).

Particularly noteworthy is that, when the Ladies Club moved to new premises at 185 Tottenham Court Road in the spring of 1897, they organised some special events. The *Dublin Evening Mail* of 8 April reported that in an afternoon simul by “that talented young player G.A. Thomas” (not yet 16) he scored +11 –3; in the evening, Henry Bird played against 15 ladies. Young George seems to have had an irregular education, as Paige indicates, but it must have been around this time he entered Wellington school. He was there in 1896, according to *Who Was Who*. How long he spent there is unknown, unless it could possibly be researched at the school itself. Afterwards George A. Thomas appears not to have entered an Oxbridge university or an Inn of Court, and perhaps just devoted himself to chess and sports.



It was also in 1896 that he entered the last of the *Dublin Mail* correspondence chess tournaments run by Thomas and Frideswide Rowland. This was the fifth (and weakest) of the series and it ended either in late 1898 or early 1899. Several British-based players entered in each of these events. The column was also printed in the *Warder*, a weekly paper from the same publisher that circulated in England, and so players could follow events there, rather than buying the Dublin evening paper.

The tournament began on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1896, but as players were only required to play three games simultaneously, this meant that the start of games was spread over three years. Sometimes under this system players withdrew before you had a chance to play them. The final crosstable was never published, so a few walkovers were scored. There were 17 starters, but three had pulled out by the time an almost complete table was printed in the *Mail* of 27 October 1898. Young George had won three games (one against a player who withdrew afterwards) and had not played the other two defaulters. He scored a draw and eight losses. No result was shown for his other two opponents, so presumably he was still playing them at this stage. As we would score this result nowadays, giving him wins by default, he would have had five and a half points from fourteen games, with two unfinished. Of course, he was still very young and inexperienced when this event started, although by the end of it he was perhaps improving fast.

On Thursday 10 June 1897, the *Mail* published the following game, so it was probably also in the *Warder* on the 12<sup>th</sup>. White was a clergyman from Birmingham.

**Rev. H. C. Briggs – G. A. Thomas**

Dublin Mail tourney-5 corr, 1896

King's Bishop's Gambit [C33]

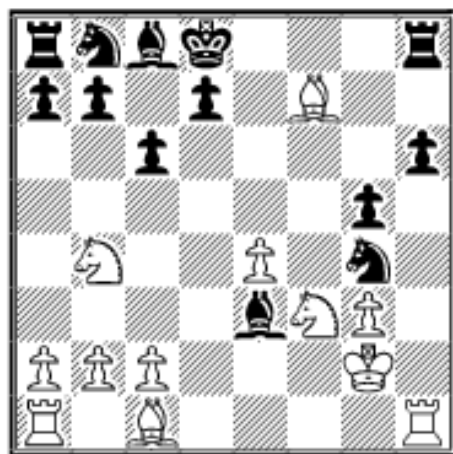
**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Bc4 Qh4+ 4 Kf1 g5 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 g3 fxg3 7 Qf3 g2+ 8 Kxg2 Nh6 9 Nd5 Kd8 10 d4 Bxd4 11 Qg3 Qxg3+ 12 hxg3 Ng4 13 Nf3 c6 14 Nb4**

14 Nxd4 is obviously better.

**14...Be3 15 Bxf7**

15 Nxg5 looks better.

**15...h6**



**16 Nd3**

What is this for? 16 Bh5 is better; now Black starts to get developed and defends well. It is no longer clear whether White has enough compensation.

**16...Bxc1 17 Raxc1 Rf8 18 Bh5 d6 19 Rhe1 Nf6 20 Bg6 Rg8 21 Bf5 Bxf5 22 exf5 Nbd7 23 Re6 Kc7 24 Rh1 Rh8 25 Nd4 a6 26 b4 Rh7 0-1!?**

Here the paper says White resigned. Although a pawn down, he is far from lost, so presumably this is the point where he withdrew from the event, most likely for personal reasons unconnected with the game. However, this is probably the first published win by the future British champion and international master, who was only fifteen at the start of the game.

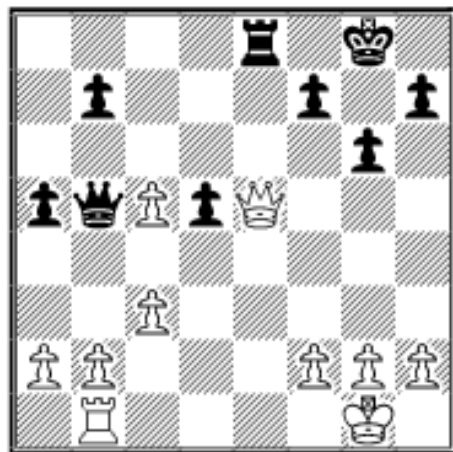
In all, six of Thomas's games were published: two wins, three losses and a draw. The other win was against a very weak opponent, but the losses were against two experienced Irish players (both academics). Also in the tournament and probably its winner, was Dr. R. Codell MacDonald, who later won six Scottish championships, four BCF correspondence championships and eight championships of the British Correspondence Chess Association! Unfortunately, we don't have Thomas's game with MacDonald. Here is the drawn game.

**G. A. Thomas – R. F. B. Jones (Dover)**

Dublin Mail tourney-5 corr, 1896

Ruy Lopez [C67]  
*Dublin Mail 27 Oct., 1898.*

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 Re1 Nd6 6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 Rxe5+ Be7 8 Ba4 0-0 9 Bb3 Bf6 10 Re1 Nf5 11 c3 d5 12 d4 g6 13 Na3 a5 14 Bf4 c6 15 Bc2 Be7 16 Bxf5 Bxf5 17 Nc2 Bxc2 18 Qxc2 Bd6 19 Qd2 Bxf4 20 Qxf4 Qb6 21 Rab1 Rfe8 22 Re5 Qb5 23 Qe3 c5 24 dxc5 Rxe5 25 Qxe5 Re8**



**26 a4!?**

Trying to make something happen; 26 Qxd5 Qxb2 27 Qb3 is also drawish.

**26...Qxa4 27 Qxd5 Qc2 28 Qd1 Qf5 29 b4 Re2 30 f3 Rd2 31 Qxd2 Qxb1+ 32 Kf2 a4 33 Qd8+ Kg7 34 Qd4+ Kg8 35 Qd8+ 1/2-1/2**

The following game, lost by the boy, is one of the earliest games by him that I have so far found. It was published in the Dublin Evening Mail of 28 April 1898 and the comments are from that paper.

**George Alan Thomas – Professor Philip G. Sandford (Ireland)**  
 Dublin Evening Mail tourney-5  
 Evans Gambit Declined [C51]

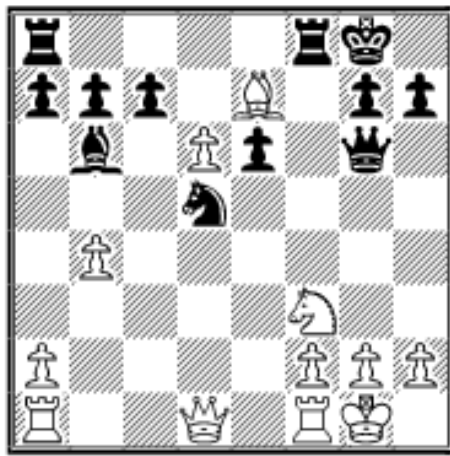
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 b4 Bb6 5 0-0 d6**

An unusual defence to this variation.

**6 c3 Be6 7 Bxe6 fxe6 8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4 Qf6 10 Bg5 Qg6 11 d5 Nce7**

Black had to provide against Qa4+.

**12 Nc3 Nf6 13 e5 Nfxd5 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 exd6 0-0 16 Be7**



The situation is now critical for Black.

**16...Rfe8 17 Ne5 Qf5 18 Nc4! Nxe7 19 dxe7 Rxe7 20 a4 Qf4 21 Nxb6 axb6 22 Qb3 c5 23 bxc5 bxc5 24 Rfe1 c4 25 Qb4 Rf7 26 f3 Qd4+ 27 Kh1 Rc7 28 Ra2? Qc5 29 Qc3 Qa5**

If Black can exchange queens, ...b5 ought to win.

**30 Qc1 Rd8 31 Rxe6 Rcd7! 32 Qxc4**

This valuable passed pawn was a great temptation, but could not be safely taken.

**32...Rd1+ 33 Re1+ Kh8 34 Rf1 Qd5 0-1**

White Resigns. If 35 Qe2 (best) 35...Rxf1+ 36 Qxf1 Qxa2 37 h3 Qc2 38 Qb5 Rd1+ 39 Kh2 Qc7+ 40 g3 Qc2+ and mates.

Between the ages of 15 and 23, the young George Alan Thomas played at least five correspondence tournaments, making by my calculations about seventy games that he played in this way between 1896 and 1904. Of course, the majority were probably never published anywhere, but I have found sixteen of them. A few are included in this article, and, on my Chess Mail website, there is a [download file](#) containing all Sir George's postal games so far recovered, along with an OTB game of his I found from 1905 against the first British ladies Champion, Kate Finn.

I know little or nothing about his activities in 1899-1900. Maybe that is the period when he was developing his skills at those racket sports at which he later excelled. By 1901, George Alan Thomas was chess champion of Portsmouth, or so he was described in the November 1901 issue of *Womanhood* magazine, whose chess column that month included a photograph of his mother. The columns of that little-known periodical are a good source of information about the young George Thomas; unfortunately the British Museum's set of the magazine was destroyed in wartime bombing and Oxford's set is incomplete. I have not yet been able to locate volumes 1 and 2, which would perhaps mention some of his activities in 1900, as the columnist was well-acquainted with lady Thomas. In the later volumes, available in Oxford, I have found several of his games and there could be more in columns that I have read but not photocopied.

George Thomas and his mother (maybe other family members too?) lived in Southsea, which is a suburb of Portsmouth. In 1901, they were both playing



in the first postal tournament organised by Rhoda Bowles in that journal, and George Thomas qualified for the final, finishing in a tie in his preliminary group with William Timbrell Pierce, the well-known problemist and chess analyst, who has featured in this column in the [past](#). Lady Thomas scored 5/6 in her group, but lost to the section winner, who scored half a point more than her.

Four of George Thomas's games from that event were published in *Womanhood*, one of them from the Final, where he scored seven and a half points out of ten, finishing joint second/third behind W. H. Gunston, a strong amateur from Cambridge. Simultaneously with the Final, starting early in 1902, the preliminaries of the second tournament were played. Unfortunately for him, Gunston was in his group, as well as a couple of other strong players (including R. C. Griffith), and he finished with a disappointing two and a half points from six games, but no doubt this tough practice stood him in good stead for the future.

Undaunted, young George played again in the third tournament (starting early 1903), and here he easily beat an opponent, who had drawn with him the previous year. He won his section convincingly, conceding only one draw, and so reached the 12-player final, the starters for which were announced in December. He entered again the fourth tournament, which began in April 1904, and so was partly simultaneous with the third final. Again he qualified. His increasing maturity as a player is clear from his notes to the following game, where he overwhelms an opponent, whom a year previously he had been unable to beat.

***George A. Thomas – A. J. Mackenzie (Birmingham)***

Womanhood tourney-3 prel-A, 1903

Ruy Lopez, Schliemann/Jaenisch Var. [C63]

*Notes by Thomas; Womanhood, July 1903*

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 d3 d6 6 a3**

To establish the B on the open diagonal, preventing Black castling; without this preparatory move, Black would be enabled to exchange his Q Kt for the B.

**6...Bd7 7 Bc4 h6**

Not very satisfactory; but it seems necessary to prevent Ng5.

**8 Nh4 Ne7 9 f4 exf4 10 Bxf4**



**10...g6**

10...g5 might have been better, and would have given rise to some curious complications, e.g. 11 e5 Ng4 (best) 12 h3 gxh4 13 Qe2! (not 13 hxg4 because of 13...Ng6 giving Black an equal game) and White regains his piece with a fine game. Or 12...gxf4 13 hxg4 fxg4 14 e6 Bc6 15 Qxg4 and wins. White appears to get a fine position in every variation.

**11 Qe2 Bg7 12 0-0 Kf8**

There is nothing better; otherwise White would presently open up the king's file with fatal effect.

**13 Rae1 g5 14 e5 dxe5 15 Bxe5 gxh4**

If 15...Nfg8 16 Bxg7+ Kxg7 17 Qe5+ Kh7 (best; if 17...Nf6 18 Qxe7+ Qxe7 19 Rxe7+ Kf8 20 Ng6 mate) 18 Bxg8+ Nxg8 19 Rxf5! and wins. Or 15...Ne8 16 Bxg7+ Nxg7 17 Qxe7+ Qxe7 18 Ng6+. From now on to the end Black's moves are forced.

**16 Bxc7 Qe8 17 Bd6 Nfg8 18 Nd5 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Rh7 20 Nxe7 Nxe7 21 Qg4 Rg7 22 Qxd4 1-0**

Resigns, for White threatens 23 Qf6+ Rf7 24 Qh8 mate. If 22...Qg6 23 Bxe7+ Ke8 (23...Rxe7 24 Qh8+ and mates next move) 24 Bf6+ &c. Or if 22...Be6 23 Bxe6 Qg6 24 Bxe7+ Ke8 (24...Kxe7 25 Bxf5+ &c) 25 Bd7+.

In his last postal tournament, the fourth of the *Womanhood* series, Thomas played well in the preliminaries, but seems to have been distracted in the final. Preliminary-A, played in the first half of 1904, included Timbrell Pierce, the Hon. V. A. Parnell and Dr. MacDonald (an army surgeon now back from the Boer War), who was the current Scottish Champion. Yet Thomas made short work of him here. At first sight, Black plays weakly, but the notes show that he had set Thomas quite a few subtle traps to be circumvented.

***G. A. Thomas – Dr. R. C. MacDonald***

Womanhood tourney-4 prel-A, 1904

Petroff Defence [C42]

*Thomas, Womanhood July 1904*

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nxe5 d6 4 Nf3 Nxe4 5 d4 d5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 0-0 Be7 8**

**Re1 Bg4 9 c3 Nf6**

An experiment; 9...f5 is the usual move and probably best.

**10 Bf4 0-0 11 Nbd2 Bd6 12 Bg5 Ne7 13 Qc2 Ng6 14 Ne5 Bc8**



Curious, but best. 14...Bh5 would lose by 15 g4; 14...Be6 would lose a pawn by 15 Nxd6 hxd6 16 Bxd6 &c., or if 14...Bd7 15 h4 with a very strong attack.

**15 Re3**

This move gives White the advantage in all variations; 15 Ndf3 was also very strong.

**15...h6 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 Rf3 Nf4**

Any move with the Q is obviously bad.

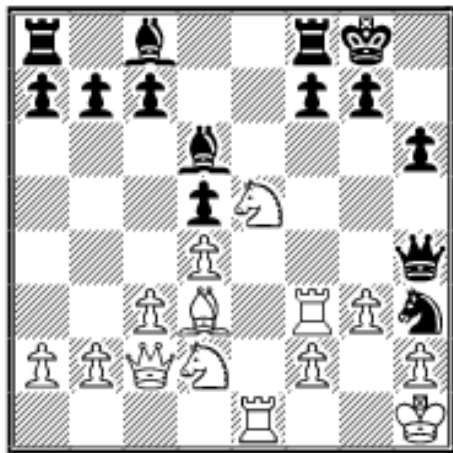
**18 Re1**

Not 18 g3 at once, because of 18...Bxe5 19 dxe5 Nh3+ 20 Kg2 Qxe5.

**18...Qh4**

18...g6 was perhaps best, but Black has no satisfactory move.

**19 g3 Nh3+ 20 Kh1**



A very important point in view of Black's best defence.

**20...Qg5?**

The best defence was 20...Qd8, when the following variation would probably have ensued: 21 Bh7+ Kh8 22 Nxf7+ Rxf7 23 Rxf7 Ng5 (to regain the exchange) 24 Rxg7! (Here is the point of 20 Kh1; if the K were at g2, Black would play 24...Bh3+ and win.) 24...Kxg7 25 Qg6+ Kh8 26

Re8+ Qxe8 27 Qxe8+ Kxh7 28 f4 Ne6 (28...Ne4 29 Nxe4 dxe4 30 Qf7+ Kh8 31 f5 wins) 29 f5 Ng7 (29...Nf8 30 Qf7+ Kh8 31 f6 Ne6 32 Nf3 followed by

Nh4 and Ng6 wins. Or 29...Ng5 30 h4 &c. wins) 30 Qg6+ Kh8 (30...Kg8 31 f6) 31 f6 Ne6 (31...Nf5 32 g4) 32 f7. This is the variation expected by White at move 15. Note that unless he could gain a piece by 28 f4 he would possibly lose through disadvantage in material.

## 21 Bh7+ 1-0

White mates in five, e.g. 21...Kh8 22 Nxf7+ Rxf7 23 Re8+ Bf8 24 Rxf8+ Rxf8 25 Rxf8.

The fourth final (split into sections) was played in early 1905 and appears to have been his final effort as a postal player. He did poorly and did not play in the simultaneously-contested fifth event. The *Womanhood* columnist, Rhoda Bowles, made excuses for Mr. Thomas. He “in the finals found himself so deeply engaged in badminton, tennis, and other tournaments that in traveling from place to place his chess was hurried, and being often pressed for time, posted moves without first working out the positions, which led to – unfortunately – unsound combinations!” (*Womanhood*, volume 14, p. 116).

After leaving school, George Alan Thomas appears to have been content to be a gentleman and sportsman of leisure on a private income, except for the years of the First World War. Paige says that from 1915-8, Thomas was a Lieutenant in the 6<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Regiment and served in Mesopotamia. Perhaps his early life in the Middle East spared him from the Western Front, since if he spoke a bit of Turkish and maybe Arabic, that would have been very useful and would account for that posting. However, this did not mean he avoided combat, as Golombek’s article reveals: “he gave up his place in a vehicle to a wounded soldier and walked in the retreat from Kut.”

As the *O.D.N.B.* article says, after his retirement from active play in 1950, Sir George became a keen spectator at chess events and liked to watch the juniors play. I remember him watching the British Under-16 Championship, in which I was competing at in Whitby in 1964.

Unfortunately, it will probably be Sir George Thomas’s fate in the chess world to be remembered as an under-achiever. He was also the perpetrator of some famous blunders (which Paige highlights) and loser of the following famous miniature.

### *Edward Lasker – G. A. Thomas*

Offhand game, London, 1912

Staunton Gambit [A83]

**1 d4 f5 2 e4 fxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 e6 5 Nxe4 Be7 6 Bxf6 Bxf6 7 Nf3 0-0 8 Bd3 b6 9 Ne5 Bb7 10 Qh5 Qe7??**



**11 Qxh7+! Kxh7 12 Nxf6+ Kh6 13  
Neg4+ Kg5 14 h4+ Kf4 15 g3+ Kf3 16  
Be2+ Kg2 17 Rh2+ Kg1 18 Kd2 mate  
1-0**

Golombek's assessment is probably always going to be accepted as correct: "That he failed to attain supreme heights was due to his lifelong status as an amateur and to a certain lack of his originality in his play. He was noted for his fine sportsmanship..."

On the other hand, he did win games against some of the great names, too. Paige lists his career record against twenty-five top contemporaries. He lost seven times against Alekhine but drew six games (one of which he should have won); he took a game each off Capablanca, Euwe and Botvinnik, and two off Flohr. In most cases, where there were several games, he had a minus score (he had eight losses to Euwe and two draws and with Flohr it was +2 -9 =4); even Miss Menchik had a plus score against him (8 wins to 7 with 7 draws). Thomas did have a plus score against his great English contemporary F. D. Yates, who was a professional (+13 -11 =13, although Yates beat him in a short match in 1914).

Highly praiseworthy are his plus score against Geza Maróczy (+3 -1 =5) and 50% records against Réti (+3 -3 =1) and Tarrasch (+1 -1 =3). Surprisingly, he had a wretched score against the Belgian master E. Colle (+1 -9 =8), whom I would have thought was of a similar standard to Thomas; maybe some psychological factor operated here. He had many tussles with Tartakower (+3 -9 =10) between 1923 and 1949.

The early games in the book are, of course, against British amateurs, but some of these were strong players, such as Shories, the London-based Dutchman Loman, and the Southampton master Joseph Henry Blake, with whom (since they were near neighbours) he probably contested far more games than the fifteen included here. Then, from 1910, Thomas started to play in higher level events. Both in 1910 and 1911, he played successfully in the USA-Great Britain cable matches for the Newnes Cup and had some games against the top players in England, such as Edward Lasker and Yates, but these end in 1915. There are no games from 1916-8 because of his war service. By the time the war ended, his father had died and George Alan Thomas inherited the title, and was presumably even wealthier than before.

When chess play resumed in 1919, Thomas was now in the first rank of British players, invited to the Hastings Victory Congress, and he remained an automatic pick for the English team through the inter-war years. In 1923 and

1934, he won the British Championship. His great rival, Yates, died in 1932, but, by 1935, Thomas faced a challenge from the new generation of masters, who later “played on the Bletchley team”: Alexander, Milner-Barry and Golombek. In the 1939 Buenos Aires olympiad, where Thomas lost to Najdorf, he played only five games, because the British team went home before the finals. Towards the very end of Thomas’s career, there were games against masters who are still alive, such as Leonard Barden and Bob Wade, but unfortunately he does not seem to have played Jonathan Penrose.

Golombek indicates that his highest achievements were scoring twelve and a half points in the Prague team tournament of 1931, and sharing joint first with Euwe and Flohr, ahead of Capablanca and Botvinnik, at Hastings in 1934-5. I won’t give any of these games, as they can easily be found in databases.

The book contains many tournament crosstables, but several of them are of very poor print quality. The author acknowledges the assistance of the *British Chess Magazine* for permission to reproduce some of their tables, but what he appears to have done is just scan them into his computer at rather low resolution, whereas he should have re-input all the data in Word or Excel files, so that the quality would be the same as the other tables he gives. This is another sign of laziness, it seems to me.

As for the other sporting activities of Sir George Thomas, Paige does write about his badminton activities, but fails to mention that he also played lawn tennis at Wimbledon several times before and after the war. Golombek says he reached the semi-final of the men’s doubles in 1911, and also played hockey for Hampshire, but badminton (on which he wrote two books) was his main love apart from chess. He was the founder president of the International Badminton Federation and held that post for twenty years. He never married, but neither have I seen any suggestion that he was homosexual. The baronetcy became extinct on his death on 23 July 1972, since he had no heir.

All in all, Paige has produced a probably sound and thorough record of the mature years of Thomas, but has not made the effort to look in some fairly obvious places for further information and games. If you are not willing to do the work, you have no business producing a book in my opinion, but nowadays it’s quite easy to do a lazy book without much financial risk. Paige’s book has 1,041 games, of which maybe a hundred are incomplete or missing altogether (no-movers). There is a diagram per game and light notes with some source credits. It is not clear if Paige has done any original annotations. At the end of the book, he correctly says that: “It is likely that there are many more scattered in various publications and chess columns throughout the country and the world. Despite an appeal in the ‘BCM’ there are, for example, no games from his early years in Portsmouth.” At the

author's [website](#), you can find out about other books he has done and download some games.

The ChessBase MegaBase 2006 has 737 games (11 of which are attributed strangely to 'Georg' Thomas), of which 92 are 0-3 moves, i.e. they don't have the game at all; or only the opening moves. I cross-referenced these with Paige's research and the book matches ChessBase exactly, i.e. no research has been done at all and most of the book is just a database dump from a commercial product. For example, on page 351 of the book, "game 643" is Thomas-Taylor, Cambridge (4), 1932, "1 e4 c6 ..40 ½-½" and "game 644," Yates-Thomas from the next round, "1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 ..53 ½-½." His remark about not wanting to "parrot" other people's work looks a bit disingenuous now, does it not? I wonder if ChessBase could sue Mr. Paige for breach of copyright?

There are games from some tournaments in this book that are not in MegaBase 2006: the 12<sup>th</sup> BCF Championship, Edinburgh 1920 (7 games), City of London Chess Club Championship 1920 (9 games), the 13<sup>th</sup> British Championship (9 games) and more games from other City of London Club Championships, on which Paige did a previous do-it-yourself book. In all, judging by the numbers alone, there may be about 300 previously unknown Thomas games in the book. It is up to you whether you care enough to pay the price of the book. To do a book like this properly really means putting in plenty of time at the British Newspaper Library, but he has spent time at the National Library of Scotland.

I have not seen the book on the City of London Club Championships myself, but just before I completed this article, I found a [review](#) of it on J. Franklin Campbell's website. A Ken Whyld Association member, Olimpiu Urcan from Singapore, did pay his money and was very disappointed. If you are considering buying any Paige book, then I suggest you read that first to give you a second opinion to go by. The Thomas book has perhaps 300 games unavailable elsewhere, so is perhaps a better value than the one that Urcan was criticising.

Paige has now switched from those publishers, "Publish and Be Damned," to another print-on-demand self-publishing house in England: Exposure Publishing, an imprint of [Diggory Press](#). The production quality of the book seems reasonably good; at least it seems fairly solid, considering the 550 pages. This is also where you can buy the Thomas book if you are so inclined. The book's ISBN is 1-905363-99-0. The price seems to be £19.99 stg., but the U.S. dollar prices I have seen on the Net seem much higher. This kind of publishing company, compared with old-style "vanity" publishers, has the advantage for the writer/seller that it is no longer necessary to go to the expense of printing and binding a few hundred books, which hardly anyone will ever see. The risk being so low, the only thing the would-be

author really loses, if his book flops, is the effort he put into writing it.

The disadvantage is mostly on the reader's side. With a traditionally published book, you can expect a certain minimum standard, so that somebody other than the author thought it worth publishing and was prepared to invest money in it; also somebody else probably did some editing work on the text. If a professional chess editor had even spent one day on the Thomas book, it would have looked much better. For example, the headers in the ChessBase output could have been tidied up, as the games read "Cambridge Cambridge 1932"; why is that? It is because in the database, "Cambridge" appears in both the "Title" and "Place" fields of the Details sub-window; if you are familiar with ChessBase, you'll know what I mean. When the game is written to a textfile by ChessBase, both appear in the header. So Paige should have gone through his CB output textfile and eliminated all these repetitions and other infelicities created by ChessBase; it's slow boring and best done with some music on, but it should have been done for any book intended for sale to the public. Similarly the crossatables should have been put into a uniform and legible format.

I can see the usefulness of outfits like Diggory, for people who want to produce a private book for family members, or a small circle like a club, or for authors who have regained the rights to their out-of-print books and would like to have a few more copies printed. I am thinking of doing that myself. In the former case, however, the readership probably knows it is not going to receive a professional-quality book. In the latter case, the fact that the book was previously in the hands of proper publishers (and sold), gives some assurance to the reader; in fact, there are probably reviews of the original edition that can be consulted. In the case of books like *The Chess Games of Sir George Alan Thomas*, I am afraid that the old Latin tag *caveat emptor* applies: "let the buyer beware."

### Postscript

This article completes ten years of *The Kibitzer*. Thank you for reading, and I hope you will continue to do so regularly. I am sorry that I cannot always respond to queries, especially when they relate, as they quite often do, to articles from the archives written a long time ago.

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