

# Guildford's 25 Years in the 4NCL: Part II

## Roger Emerson and Nigel Povah explain how Guildford continued to raise the bar

Taking over management from Nigel in November 2011, Roger brought in a number of new players, including grandmaster Romain Edouard (about whom more later), and several overseas titled players now living in or with close ties to England, including GM David Smerdon, IM Gediminas Sarakas, his wife Zivile and her sister IM Dagne Ciuksyte, who is now a mainstay of the England Women's team.

Because we had slipped to a disappointing seventh place the previous season, in 2011/12 we were due to meet favourites Wood Green in round 4 in January 2012, so Roger sought to ambush them by bringing back Ety Stefanova and also hiring Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Nigel Short on the top two boards.

Unfortunately things didn't go to plan. Nigel got outplayed as Black by David Howell in a strange French Defence (see *CHESS*, March 2012, pp. 30-31) and MVL was lucky to escape with a draw against Stephen Gordon, who missed a winning chance:

### M.Vachier-Lagrave-S.Gordon

Guildford vs Wood Green, 4NCL 2012



Stephen has just played 23...e5. Realising that 24 ♖e3 ♗b7, with the threat of 25...♞e4 was winning for Black, as was 24 ♗xe5 ♞e4, Maxime felt he needed to hit out: **24 g5!?**

Now Black can actually play 24...exd4 as 25 ♗xd4 ♞a5 26 gxf6 g6 is fine for him. **24...f5**

This looks fine, but after... **25 ♗xe5! ♞e4 26 f3 ♞e3+ 27 ♞f2 ♞xg5+ 28 ♗h2 ♗xe5 29 f4**

...White recovers the piece.

**29...♞g2+ 30 ♞xg2 ♗xg2 31 ♗g1 ♗e4**

**32 ♗xg2 ♗xf4 33 ♗d7**

And Maxime was able to generate sufficient counterplay to liquidate down to a drawn ending.

However, ½/2 on our top two boards was certainly not what we had been hoping for. Worse was to follow, as Dave Smerdon missed a chance against Nick Pert just before the time control:

### N.Pert-D.Smerdon

Wood Green vs Guildford, 4NCL 2012



**38...h4! 39 fxg4 hxg3?**

With seconds left, Dave misses 39...h3! 40 ♖f3 (or 40 ♖xc6 b4!) h2 41 g5 g6 42 g4 ♗d5!, winning.

**40 ♖f3 ♗d5? 41 ♗xd5+ cxd5 42 g5 g2 43 ♗d4...**And White won.

One further win with White and no losses for Wood Green saw them come out as comfortable 5½-2½ winners, and our further loss against White Rose in round 9 relieved Wood Green of any pressure as they powered to their sixth championship.

## 2012-13

Clearly something more was needed if Guildford was going to mount a serious challenge in 2012/13. So, in addition to having Ety Stefanova and Nigel Short playing on a regular basis, Roger added Gawain Jones and Robin van Kampen while bringing back Mark Hebden.

By the final weekend another tight finish against Wood Green seemed in prospect, so Roger managed the coup of bringing Matthew

Sadler back to English chess. For their part, Wood Green added Alexei Shirov and Vassily Ivanchuk to the mix, after pretending to have signed up fifteen of the top sixteen players in the world. Apparently this was an idea cooked up in the pub; perhaps it should have stayed there, but it gave Roger the inspiration for a Star Wars themed team talk about defeating the Wood Green "Evil Empire".

Round 10 on the Sunday swung our way, as an 8-0 demolition of Cheddleton, who had previously drawn 4-4 with Wood Green, saw us finally edging ahead on the all-important game points. And so to Round 11, where Roger's guesses on pairings worked.

Simon Ansell's excellent article in the June 2013 edition of *CHESS* (pp. 14-19) covered our all-GM clash against Wood Green in some detail, including Gawain Jones's "solid" draw on board 1 against Alexei Shirov, Mickey Adams's win for Wood Green on board 2 balanced by Robin van Kampen's win on board 7 for Guildford, and Nigel Short's scrambled draw on board 5 against David Howell. While the other four boards were all draws, they were all highly competitive.

Perhaps the most comfortable, on its face, was Matthew Sadler's draw with Black against Ivanchuk on board 4(!), in what Nigel Short called "a rancid Dutch". The players' joint post-mortem showed how much they had both seen.

### V.Ivanchuk-M.Sadler

Wood Green vs Guildford, 4NCL 2013

*Dutch Defence*



The two players analysed this position after the game in some depth, with Roger Emerson

and Luke McShane looking on, exploring Ivanchuk's suggestion of 16 ♖fe1. Further discussion produced this analysis: 16...e5! 17 cxd5 ♗xd5 18 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 19 g4! ♙f7 (19...♙g6 20 gxf5 ♙xf5? 21 e4 ♗xd4 22 ♖c4 pins and wins) 20 f4!? (a remarkable possibility pointed out by Ivanchuk; after 20 gxf5 exd4 21 e4 ♖a5 22 ♗c4 ♙xc4 23 ♖xc4+ ♗h8 Black is at least OK) 20...exd4 (Matthew later decided 20...exf4 was likely stronger) 21 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 22 gxf5 dxe3 23 ♖xe3 ♖f6 (Black has some practical compensation for the exchange) 24 ♖d3 (the modern day engines think White is clearly better after the calm 24 ♖cd1 or 24 ♗e4) 24...♗b4 (if 24...♗d4 25 ♖e5 ♖b6 26 ♗f1) 25 ♖c3 (Black is winning at the end of the long line 25 ♖g3 ♖b6+ 26 ♗f1 ♖xf5 27 ♖e8+ ♗f7 28 ♖ce1 g5 29 ♖1e7+ ♗g6! 30 ♖f8 ♖b5+ 31 ♗e1? ♗d3+ 32 ♗d1 ♙xb3+ 33 axb3 ♖xf8) 25...♖b6+ 26 ♖c5 ♗d3 is very promising for Black.

**16 cxd5 exd5 17 ♖fe1 ♗d6 18 ♖b5 ♖b8 19 ♖c5 a6 20 ♗a4 b6 21 ♖c3 a5 22 ♗b2 ♗b4 23 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 24 ♖xc7 ♗e8 25 ♖cc1 ♗xa2 26 ♖c2 ♗b4 27 ♖c3 ♗a2 ½-½**

We subsequently decided that slightly better for Black beforehand would have been to play 14...♖ad8 before ...♙h5 and wait to see White's response before moving his bishop, but all in all it was an excellent game by Matthew and just what we needed.

On board 3, Romain Edouard's early space advantage against Luke McShane came to naught, and he had a knight worryingly offside approaching the time control. A nice combination solved all his problems, and we had another half-point in the bag.

### R.Edouard-L.McShane

Guildford vs Wood Green, 4NCL 2013



**38 h4 ♖g8 39 g5+! hxg5 40 hxg5+ ♗f7 41 ♗c4! dxc4 42 ♖xe6! ♗xe6 43 ♙c4+ ♗f5 ½-½**

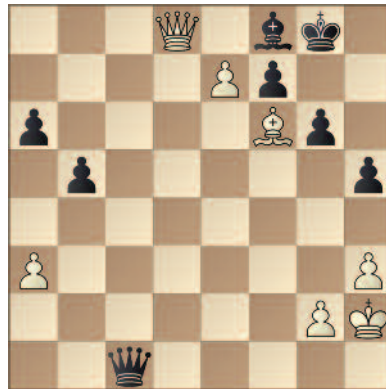
On the lower boards Ety Stefanova and Mark Hebden both had winning chances against Nick Pert and Jonathan Rowson, but two further draws were sufficient for us to tie the match 4-4 and become champions.

Even more rejoicing followed as Guildford II somehow managed to avoid relegation by the slenderest of margins through a final round 6-2

win against none other than Wood Green II. On board 1, Yang-Fan Zhou was the happy recipient of a time-trouble present from Alex Baburin:

### Y.F.Zhou-A.Baburin

Guildford II vs Wood Green II, 4NCL 2013



**38...♖f4+ 39 ♙g1 ♖c1+ 40 ♗f2 ♖c2+?? 40...♖f4+ draws.**

**41 ♙g3 1-0**

Realising that he could no longer keep checking, Black resigned. It's worth remembering that the 4NCL was still operating time controls with no increments – something we had to keep reminding our international players – so such disasters were a more common occurrence then.

Another noteworthy win was by David Smerdon on board 2 against John Emms, Dave trying out the Portuguese variation of the Scandinavian for the first time in the 4NCL. Having had mixed fortunes with the Stonewall, Dave found the Portuguese more to his liking – an opening position rated a disaster by all the engines, but allowing the attacking (not to mention swindling!) chances that he loves:

### J.Emms-D.Smerdon

Wood Green II vs Guildford II, 4NCL 2013  
*Scandinavian Defence*

**1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♗f6 3 ♗f3 ♙g4 4 ♙b5+ ♗bd7 5 h3 ♙h5 6 c4 e6 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 d4 c6 9 ♙a4 ♗b6 10 ♙b3 ♙b4+ 11 ♗c3 0-0 12 ♙e3 a5 13 a3 ♙xc3+ 14 bxc3 a4 15 ♙a2 ♖e7 16 g4 ♙g6 17 ♗e5 ♙e4 18 f3 ♗d7!?**



Now 19 0-0 would have been prudent:

for example, 19...♗xe5 20 dxe5 ♖h4 21 ♖e2 ♙d3! 22 ♖f2 ♖xf2+ 23 ♖xf2 ♗xc4 24 ♙d4 and Black has trouble preserving his minor pieces.

**19 fxe4**

Black now obtains real attacking chances.

**19...♗xe5 20 dxe5 ♖h4+ 21 ♗e2 ♖g3 22 ♖f1 ♖g2+ 23 ♖f2 ♖xf2+ 24 ♙xf2 ♖f8 25 ♗d4 ♖f3+ 26 ♗e1?**



This attempt to hang on to the piece is a mistake. 26 ♙d2 would have been OK. Now Dave finishes off accurately.

**26...♖h1+ 27 ♙g1 c5 28 ♖e3 ♖f3 29 ♖xc5 ♗d7 30 ♗d4 ♗xe5 31 c5 ♖f8 32 ♙xe6+ ♗h8 33 ♖e3 ♖g2 34 ♙f5 ♗f3+ 35 ♙d1 ♖d8+ 36 ♙c1 ♖d2 37 ♖xf3 ♖c2+ 38 ♙b1 ♖b2+ 0-1**

## 2013/14

So 2012/13 had been a success – just. Winning the title, combined with our second team's miracle survival in Division One, was gratifying and a relief, but during the summer months we looked to overhaul the squad in order to strengthen it overall and be ready for the expected Wood Green counterattack. In particular, we looked for more young players in search of titles and for others who were prepared to put in the Sunday 'hard yards' rather than stay up too late carousing in the bar on Saturday night.

London resident Alberto Suarez became a regular along with GM Jean-Pierre Le Roux, and star juniors Matthew Wadsworth and Akshaya Kalaiyalahan also joined. Alberto's first full season for us was capped with a sparkling victory against Jonathan Hawkins, which gave Alberto his third norm and the IM title.

### A.Suarez Real-J.Hawkins

Guildford II vs Cheddleton, 4NCL 2014  
*Caro-Kann Defence*

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♗d7 5 ♗g5 ♗gf6 6 ♙d3 e6 7 ♗1f3 ♙d6 8 ♖e2 h6 9 ♗e4 ♗xe4 10 ♖xe4 ♖c7 11 0-0 b6 12 ♖g4 ♗f8 13 b3 ♙b7 14 ♙b2 ♗f6 15 ♖h3 ♗d5 16 g3 ♗b4**

All played many times up to here, but latest theory in this line now seems to favour 16...c5, as recommended on page 367 of Daniel Fernandez's monumental guide *The Modernized Caro-Kann*.



17 ♖e4 f5 18 ♜g5 ♔e7 19 ♜xe6+  
♚xe6 20 ♗xf5 ♚f7 21 ♚ae1



This had all been seen before, but 21 c4 ended as a draw in Sutovsky-Antoniewski, Italian Team Championship 2011. Alberto's move is much stronger.

21...♚e8

21...♚d8 22 ♖e6 ♚f6 isn't pretty for Black, but this loses.

22 ♚e6 ♚xe6 23 ♚xe6 ♚f6 24 ♖c8! ♖a8

24...♚e7 is no better: 25 ♗xb7 ♚xb7 26 ♚e1 ♖e7 27 c4! and Black can't untangle his pieces in time to stop White's attack.

25 ♚e1 ♜d5 26 ♚e6 ♚d8 27 ♚f5+ ♜f6

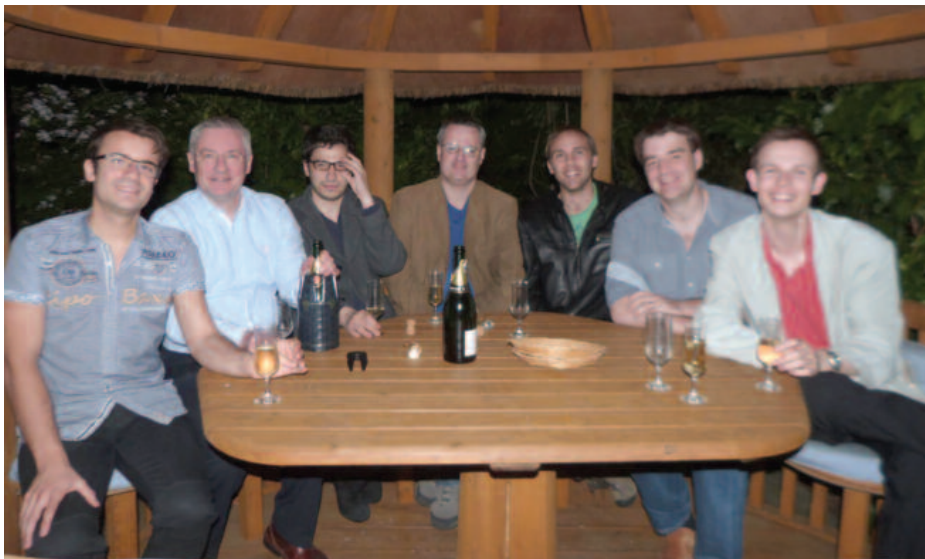


28 d5! ♗f7 29 ♚xf6+ gxf6 30.♖e6+ ♗g7 31.♚g4+ ♗f8 32.♚g6 ♚e7 33 ♖xf6 ♚h7 34 ♚g4 cxd5 35 ♖xh8 1-0

A very impressive game by Alberto.

Neither Guildford nor Wood Green had any mishaps in the first seven divisional rounds, both winning all their matches by large margins. Going into the final weekend, Wood Green in fact held a one game-point advantage, but although they won their round 9 and 10 matches by further large margins, we managed to outscore them – despite Mark Hebden suffering a loss to Sue Maroroa-Jones, who had been helped by husband Gawain's opening preparation! Going into the final round, we had managed to snatch a small game-point lead which meant that Wood Green would need to win the match to take the title.

Round 11 was another all-GM clash with the teams having virtually equal average ratings of about 2650. Wood Green had brought in Luke McShane, Jon-Ludwig Hammer, Viktor Laznicka and Alexei Shirov, while we had added Maxime Vachier-Lagrave



Guildford players celebrate regaining the title after a draw with Wood Green at Hinckley Island at the end of the 2012/13 4NCL season (from left to right): Romain Edouard, captain Roger Emerson, Laurent Fressinet, Gavin Wall, Dave Smerdon, Gawain Jones and Peter Lalic.

and Anish Giri on the top two boards.

The match was covered in detail in the June 2014 edition of *CHESS*, including a front-cover photo by John Saunders of Roger in formal kimono with samurai sword, ready to gee up the troops with a showing of the classic film *Yojimbo* (subsequently copied in the spaghetti western *A Fistful of Dollars*). Perhaps Roger's pep talk was too successful, because Romain Edouard on board 3 was inspired as Black to play an ultra-aggressive opening:

### J.L.Hammer-R.Edouard

Wood Green vs Guildford, 4NCL 2014  
*Queen's Gambit Accepted*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e4 b5!? 4 a4 c6  
5 axb5 cxb5 6 ♜c3 a6 7 ♜xb5 axb5  
8 ♚xa8 ♖b7 9 ♚a1 e6



What does Black have for the exchange? Clearly something, as there are now over 70 games on the database, involving such strong exponents as Nakamura. Romain himself has played it several times with good results, having used about a week's worth of super-computer time to validate his analysis. As the game shows, Black's two bishops can combine to great effect, but the main advantage in this game was psychological: Hammer was immediately

under pressure against a prepared opening and on at least two occasions adopted a passive 'safety-first' approach, when something more dynamic was needed.

10 ♖e2

10 f3 and 10 ♜f3 are other possibilities but, faced himself by this variation, Romain has also played this move.

♜f6 11 ♜f3 ♜xe4

11...♖b4+ 12 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 13 ♚xd2 ♜xe4 is probably stronger, as played by Romain in a subsequent game.

12 0-0 ♚d5 13 ♜e1 ♜c6 14 ♜c2 ♖d6

And here 14...♖e7 may be stronger.

15 ♖f3 ♖b8 16 ♚e1 f5 17 ♖xe4 fxe4  
18 ♚g4 0-0 19 ♚xe4 ♚xe4 20 ♚xe4 e5  
21 dxe5 ♖xe5



22 ♚b1?

After playing well under pressure, White finally weakens. The retreat 22 ♚e1! would have preserved the advantage: 22...c3 can be met by 23 ♚xe5 ♜xe5 24 bxc3, but 23 b3 is also good enough.

22...♖f6 23 ♚e2 ♖c8

This might have been even stronger the previous move.

24 b3 ♖g4

By now White was particularly short of time.

25 ♗f1?

25 f3 was better.

25...c3

Now and over the next few moves Romain prefers to keep the two bishops. While the engines think he should take the rook, this is a practical example of the old maxim about the threat being worse than the execution.

**26 ♖e3 ♖a8 27 ♖c5 ♖a2 28 f3 ♖f5 29 ♖c1 ♖d3 30 b4 ♖g5 0-1**

Meanwhile, on board 1, MVL was so shocked by Romain's "unsound" opening that he felt he needed to win with Black to counter Romain's "inevitable loss". Maxime, a month older than Romain, has been winding him up ever since they were kids, so his remarks shouldn't be taken too seriously. Nevertheless he put in a very polished performance to outplay Mickey Adams. This game didn't get published at the time, but it's worthy of study:

### M.Adams-M.Vachier-Lagrave

Wood Green vs Guildford, 4NCL 2014  
*Sicilian Najdorf*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 a6 6 ♖e3 ♖g4 7 ♖g5 h6 8 ♖h4 g5 9 ♖g3 ♖g7 10 ♖d2 ♖c6 11 ♖b3 b5 12 h4**

Mickey varies from 12 f3, which he played against Gelfand in the London Classic six months earlier.

**12...b4 13 ♖a4 gxh4 14 ♖xh4 ♖d7 15 f3 ♖ce5 16 fxg4 ♖xa4 17 0-0-0 ♖d7 18 ♖e2**

Perhaps 18 ♖d4, eyeing f5, was better. Mickey may have expected that his queen sortie might result in a draw by repetition.

**18...♖xg4 19 ♖xb4 a5 20 ♖b7 ♖b8 21 ♖a7 ♖a8 22 ♖b7 ♖b8**



Maxime correctly assesses that a queen exchange will give him the advantage.

**23 ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 24 c3 a4 25 ♖d4 ♖e3 26 ♖dg1 ♖g8 27 ♖f2 ♖g4 28 ♖e1 ♖e5 29 ♖b1 ♖f6 30 ♖f3 h5 31 ♖h4 ♖g4**

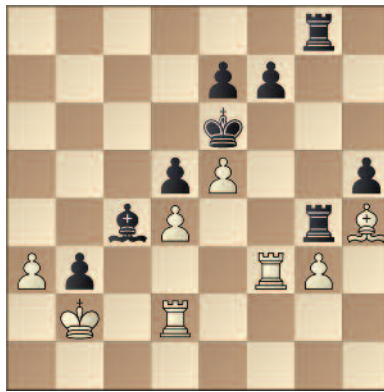
White has been forced into a passive position, and Black's next few moves turn the screw.

**32 a3 ♖e3 33 ♖e2 ♖xd4 34 cxd4 ♖b5 35 ♖h3 ♖xe2 36 ♖xe3 ♖a6 37 e5 ♖g4 38 g3 d5**

White's bishop is now out of play.

**39 ♖d1 ♖d7 40 ♖d2 ♖c4 41 b4 axb3 42 ♖b2 ♖e6 43 ♖f3 ♖bg8**

The start of a series of manoeuvres to enable the black rooks to infiltrate White's position.



**44 ♖ff2 ♖e4 45 ♖d1 ♖gg4 46 ♖c3 ♖e3+ 47 ♖b2 ♖ge4 48 ♖dd2 ♖e1 49 ♖h2 ♖g1 50 ♖hf2 ♖ee1 51 ♖c3 ♖a1 52 ♖b4 ♖a2 0-1**

Faced with the threat of 53...♖ga1, Mickey resigned.

Things got even better for us when deep opening preparation by Gawain produced a dangerous pawn sacrifice in the main line of the Caro-Kann:

### G.Jones-V.Laznicka

Guildford vs Wood Green, 4NCL 2014



White has sacrificed a pawn to open the g-file and lure Black's knight to an exposed post. The normal response 19 exf6 leads to the exchange of knights and Black's position being freed up at the slight expense of a weak e6 pawn. Gawain prefers to keep Black's position more cramped, albeit at the cost of a pawn

**19 ♖c3!? ♖a6 20 ♖b5 ♖xf2 21 ♖xf2 ♖xb5 22 ♖g3 ♖h8**

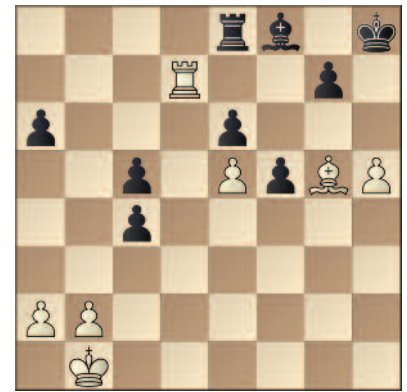
In the commentary room Jon Speelman suggested 22...♖ad8 23 ♖dg1 g5! 24 hxg6 ♖xd2 25 ♖xh6 ♖fd8 as forcing White to take a draw. This would certainly have been safer, although *Stockfish's* perfect defence favours Laznicka's move.

**23 ♖hg1 ♖f7 24 ♖g6 ♖e8 25 ♖f4 ♖f8?**

But this is a mistake. 25...♖h4! protects the e-pawn while enabling the bishop to keep defending f6.

**26 ♖xh6 ♖d7 27 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 28 ♖g5 ♖e8 29 c4! a6 30 ♖d1 b5 31 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 32 ♖d7 bxc4**

At a temporary cost of two pawns White has blocked in the black bishop.

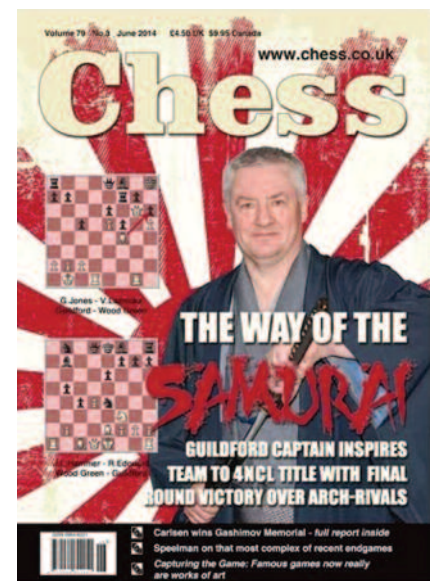


**33 ♖c2 ♖a8 34 a4 ♖g8 35 ♖b7 f4 36 ♖xf4 ♖d8 37 a5 ♖d4 38 ♖d2 ♖h4 39 ♖b6 ♖xh5 40 ♖xa6 g5 41 ♖xe6 g4 42 a6 ♖h1 43 ♖e8 c3 44 ♖xc3 ♖h7 45 e6 g3 1-0**

And Black resigned before White could play 46 e7.

Matthew Sadler held Shirov comfortably with Black on board 5, and Guildford got solid draws on the three lowest boards, which left the game between Anish Giri and Luke McShane as the last to finish. Their encounter was evenly balanced past the first time control, but a perhaps injudicious pawn push by Luke left his position with a number of weaknesses, which Anish eventually managed to exploit.

The final result was therefore a 6-2 victory for Guildford, avenging our loss by a similar margin two years before. This was perhaps instrumental in persuading Brian Smith to withdraw from sponsoring Wood Green in the 4NCL and retreat to his London League stronghold, thus bringing to an end over a decade of intense rivalry between our two teams, in which both teams had won five championships, broken only by *Pride & Prejudice* in 2010-11. With hindsight, we can say we enjoyed it all (as, we hope, did Brian), but boy was it tough!



*Ed. – Roger and Nigel will bring us up to date with Guildford's 4NCL adventures in the November CHESS.*