

# VICTOR JOHN DUNLEAVY

15 March 1929 – 9 April 2008

by

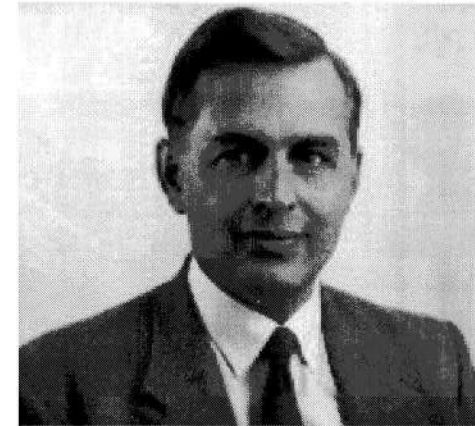
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V. J. ('John') Dunleavy had a life-long passion for chess, but it was not until he retired to Devon in 1990 that he had the time to devote to chess administration and in that relatively short time made a great contribution to the organisation of the game in, firstly, his newly-adopted county of Devon, then the West of England Chess Union, and then to the BCF, which, under the guidance of John and a few colleagues, evolved into the English Chess Federation.

His line of the Dunleavy family had left Ireland at the time of the great Potato Famine of 1845 and had for several generations settled in Blackburn, Lancashire.

John's paternal grandfather, John 'Bob' Dunleavy (b. 03.01.1882 in Blackburn) was a Musician Sergeant in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was stationed in Portsmouth when he met and married Emily Annie Ayling on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1905. Emily Annie had been born in Chichester on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1885 and her mother, Emily Shippam, was a member of the family who made Shippam's meat and fish pastes. Emily Shippam's parents came from Boxgrove, Sussex, so there was some logic, though coincidental, in John Dunleavy ending his days in that area.

Bob and Emily Dunleavy soon had two children, Margaret May and Victor John, but Bob died shortly after on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1909, and in 1910 his widow Emily married one of her late husband's colleagues, Frank Arnell, and they settled in Southampton.

When Bob's son, Victor John Dunleavy snr, grew up he married Dorothy Pople, a local girl from Southampton. Our Victor John jr was their first born, and was called John from the start to distinguish him from his father Victor. Two brothers followed, Robert Malcolm (b.07.09.1932) and Roger Graham (b. 30.12.1940).

John was academically gifted and at the age of 10, a year early, got a scholarship to Taunton's Grammar School in Southampton. Before the war, it was a fee-paying school but awarded plenty of scholarships to local boys like John to ensure they got pupils of talent.

John was due to start there in September 1939, but world events upset the usual routine. On 24<sup>th</sup> August the BBC broadcast an announcement that all teachers in evacuation areas were to report to their schools at 9 a.m. on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Southampton had been designated an evacuation area in

anticipation of the major port of Southampton becoming a prime target for enemy bombing. Radio announcements came in rapid succession and had almost immediate effect. First, the summer holiday was to end on 29<sup>th</sup> August and the evacuation of schools was to start on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September. There were two days of near panic as parents sought to know what had to be done in so short a time. John, together with all pupils had to report to Taunton's School at 6.30 a.m. on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, from where they were to be evacuated en masse to Bournemouth, where they would share the campus of Bournemouth School.

On arrival at Taunton's, he already held his one permitted item of hand-luggage, and was issued with a gas-mask, paper carrier bag and identity label. The boys were split into two groups of 50, each with its own identity banner and letter; one of the group being the future TV comedian, Benny Hill. At a given signal the first group with John in it moved off, to be followed in due course by the second. They walked in procession, led by a policeman and the school's English master, Dr. Horace King carrying the banner, from the school to Southampton Central station. The designated train duly arrived at 10.30 a.m. and the boys got on, to the order "*eight children and one adult per compartment*". Everything went smoothly to plan, not least because Dr. King was a good organiser. He was elected to Parliament as Labour MP for Southampton Test in 1950 and became the first Labour Speaker of the House of Commons (1965 – 71).



*Future Speaker of the House of Commons, Dr. King, with young John Dunleavy, Benny Hill and others.*

On arrival in Bournemouth, John's group was sent to a distribution centre at St. Paul's School, where the group assembled, each boy waiting to be claimed by whoever happened to come in. It was a pure lottery as to which adult claimed which pupil, and some boys were luckier than others. John was claimed by an elderly, kindly couple, Mr. & Mrs. Shaw of Boscombe Down, who had never had children of their own and to whom John became like a son, and the war hadn't even started yet. He stayed with the Shaws for the duration of the war.

Taunton's had a strong tradition in the physical sports and had had a chess club since November 1896. It had been introduced by the Chairman of the Governors, Robert W. Chipperfield, a

life-long supporter of the game, who wrote "*A knowledge of chess I hold to be, if not the panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to, at least a solace to a few of them; besides which it is an instructor – it teaches its votaries patience, perseverance and politeness, hope and resignation, to submit with equanimity to defeat, and not to be cocky when victorious or successful*". The chess club was part of an unbroken ethos of the school, not dependent on the keenness, or lack of it, of any one master. Its fortunes over the years had inevitably varied with the intake, but although the immediate pre-war years were not particularly illustrious by their own standards, the school B team twice won the Hampshire League Div II, while the A team came 2<sup>nd</sup> in Division 1 in 1935 – 36. Players of that era included N. V. Boniface, and L. G. O'Neill who won the British Boys' U-18 Championship in 1937, a title won in other years by the likes of Milner-Barry, C. H. O'D Alexander and Penrose. At this time, Taunton's hosted a spectacular Living Chess match, the players being Portsmouth-born Sir George Thomas and C. H. O'D Alexander, with the boys dressed up as the pieces. Held on a blazing June day, it was a perfect scenario, except that some of the pieces not taken early in the game fainted from the heat in their heavy costumes.

It is easy to see how John, in this kind of atmosphere, developed his love of the game. After the war, the school returned to its old premises and normal services were resumed. The chess club's A team won the Robertson Cup in 1945-46 for the first time in the history of the school, the members of this history-making team being J. F. Barrett, A. E. Neill, J. L. Levy, D. G. Newton, K. Robinson and V. J. **Dunleavy**. The lasting nature of the love of chess inculcated by the school was demonstrated by the existence of a club for former pupils – Old Tauntonians. In the 1946 – 47 season, while John was in his final year at the school, they won the Hampshire League.

		P	W	L	D	F	A
1 <sup>st</sup>	Old Tauntonians	6	4	1	1	17	13
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Southampton	6	3	1	2	18	12
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Portsmouth	4	1	2	1	11	9
4 <sup>th</sup>	Andover	4	0	0	0	4	16

His school was clearly at the very epicentre of all chess in Hampshire at this time. It also developed his love for sport, albeit from the comfort of his armchair, particularly football (he supported Southampton, 'The Saints', all his life), cricket, rugby, golf and snooker.

Even in the difficult wartime circumstances John passed his School Certificate with flying colours, and was faced with deciding which subjects to take at A level. His first love was Mathematics, but got talked into taking Languages by teachers who may have had their own agenda, and he took French, German and Spanish, which in retrospect he considered a mistake.



*The Librarians of the Senior Library –  
John Dunleavy seated 2<sup>nd</sup> right.*

He had set his heart on going to Oxford University and sat their entrance exam. He was fully expected to pass, but for the first and only time in his life failed an examination. The irony was that if he had stuck to his first instinct and taken Maths A level he would probably have succeeded. It hit him hard and he refused to try for any other university, leaving Taunton's at 19 and going straight into the compulsory national service, joining the RAF. He spent most of this two years in Scotland working on radar.

On demobilisation, he found a job in Southampton with a wholesale greengrocer. As a recreation, he went with two friends to a local drama group, where he met Joan Wilson, a former pupil of the Convent High School who had also been recently demobbed, in her case from the WRNS.

They married in 1952, and spent the rest of the 1950s in Birmingham, where John had got a job with the British Tabulating Machine Company. This somewhat arcane sounding company had started in the US as the little-known Tabulating Machine Company. In 1908 they had granted an exclusive licence to the British company to licence its punched-card machines.

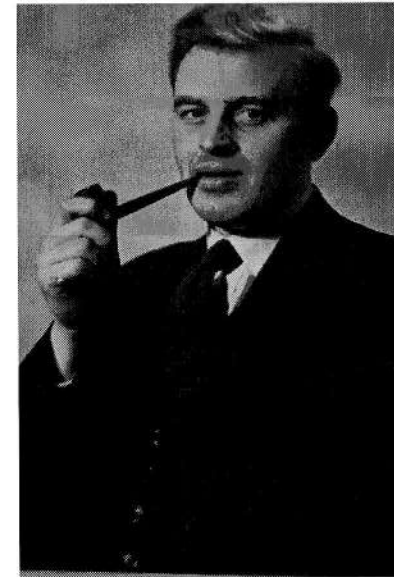
This was now 1952, the dawn of the age of the electronic computer. The American parent company became IBM and its British counterpart, after a series of takeovers and mergers, became International Computers Limited (ICL) in 1959. John stayed with ICL for the rest of his working life.

He first moved to the Hall Green area of Birmingham, south of the city centre and from there to the Handsworth district where he joined the Lozells Chess Club, playing regularly in the Birmingham League. It was here that he first met and played against Roy Heppinstall, 40 years later to serve together on the BCF Management Board.

He stayed in Birmingham until the autumn of 1958, when they moved to Carshalton in the south London Borough of Sutton, where they brought up two sons, Alastair Mark (b. 03.01.1961) and Malcolm David (10.12.1962).

In August 1959 he entered the BCF Congress in York, where he played in the usually very strong Major Open. However, Peter Clarke reporting the event for the BCM, observed significantly "*It is disappointing to see this Major Open getting steadily weaker year by year, as it undoubtedly is. Just after the war it was always full of first-rate players*". To rub it in, of the 36 players John came last but one, with 3/11 points. Only the 93 year old E. Douglas Fawcett,

another Devon Pioneer, came below him. Both would have reaped better rewards in a lower section.



*An early attempt at giving up cigarettes*

Shortly after arriving in London, he joined the Wallington & Carshalton Club, and soon became involved in the Surrey County Chess Association. He was a full member of the SCCA from his first season there, and became a Vice President from 1973, actively working on the Council. However, as the world-wide computer business developed, he became increasingly involved in his career, which left less and less time for chess.

The burgeoning computer business led to a constant series of mergers and take-overs. In Prime Minister Harold Wilson's 1960s vision of a white hot technological revolution, it was

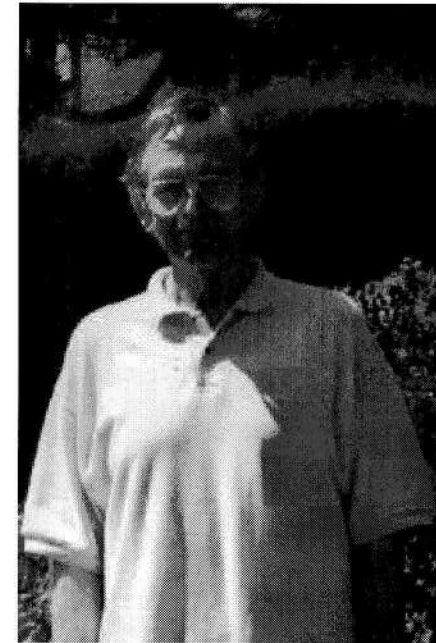
clear that Britain would never be in a position to stake a claim in the world-wide computer market while most large companies tried to develop their own models in a multitude of subsidiaries. In this political atmosphere John's original British Tabulating Machine Company, having become International Computers Ltd (ICL) in 1959, swallowed up the computer arms of firms like GEC (1961), EMI (1962), Ferranti (1963), English Electric (1963) & Marconi (1964), leaving them to concentrate on their core businesses and letting ICL produce the computers.

Throughout this process, there were inevitably thousands of retirements and redundancies among the companies concerned, but John rose within ICL, holding a series of different posts and finishing as a Senior Executive in the Compensation Department, in which capacity he travelled the world constantly. He never quite made the Board, but was close. On retirement, ICL's Chairman and Chief Executive, Peter Bonfield, presented him with a book inscribed

*"To John Dunleavy, Many thanks on behalf of the Board of ICL for 39 years' service", adding significantly, "Thanks for your personal support, Peter Bonfield – April 4<sup>th</sup> 1990".*

He had taught both his sons to play chess. At one point Alastair became SCCU Under-11 Champion and went on to captain Dulwich College chess team, in the footsteps of Ray Keene, but after winning a place at Warwick University, gave the game up "lest he become like Bobby Fischer". Malcolm was not so keen, but his two sons, having been taught from an early age by their grandfather, enjoy a game from time to time.

John retired in 1990 and moved to a house on the outskirts of Kingsbridge in South Devon. He started to study for a degree with the Open University, but at the same time had more time to get involved with his new county association, the DCCA. Gradually and inevitably the chess overtook the academic studies as he became more and more involved in organisation, and he was forced to drop this OU ambition.



*John in relaxed mode in 1996*

He became Devon Competitions Secretary for a time while studying for his arbiter's exam. After qualification, he officiated at the Paignton Congress from 1996 and other local events.

When Harry Golombek died in 1995, he left a sum of money in his Will for the promotion of chess, details to be determined by The Friends of Chess. John lobbied them, arguing that as Golombek had won the 1st Paignton Congress in 1951, ahead of Euwe and Donner, it would be very appropriate to celebrate the venerable event's Golden Anniversary with an international tournament in his memory. This was agreed and in 2000, with the cooperation of Gerry Walsh, an executor to the Golombek estate, a 10 man All-Play-All was organised. Under John's leadership, the event was meticulously planned, with committee members often being faced with agendas containing over 60 items.

The invitees were Dr. John Nunn, Keith Arkell who had been a supporter of the congress for many years, Danny Gormally, Mark Hebden and Matthew Turner from England, Klaus Bischoff and Alexander Naumann from Germany, Robert Fontaine the promising French junior, Karel van der Weide (Netherlands) and Tiger Hillarp-Persson (Sweden). So well organised was it by John, there was little scope for snags, and the event ran smoothly. In fact, he remained so much in the background throughout that it was easy to forget the magnitude of his contribution.

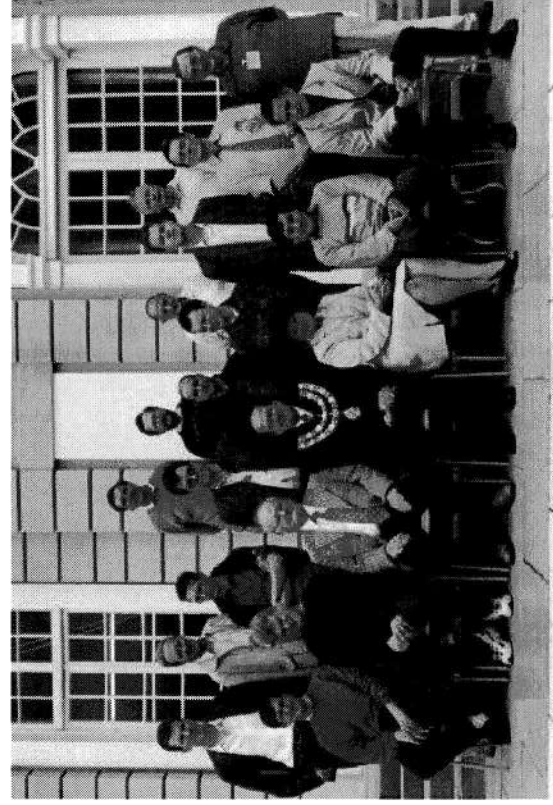
In fact, this event seemed to encapsulate his approach to life in general. He had always been a shy person, shunning any hint of limelight while happy to keep on the road any event for which he was responsible. In the photographs, he can be seen standing, almost reluctantly, at the edge of the group.

Golombek Memorial Tournament Paignton 3<sup>rd</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> September 2000 Category 11

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	tot
1 Nunn		X	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	½	5½
2 Bischoff	Eng		½	0	1	½	1	½	½	1	5½
3 Hebden	Ger	X	½	1	½	0	1	0	1	½	5
4 Fontaine	Eng	½		X	0	1	½	½	½	1	5
5 Turner	Fra	½	0	½	1	½	½	½	1	½	5
6 Gormally	Eng	½	0	½	X	½	½	½	½	1	4½
7 Arkell	Eng	0	½	1	½	X	½	½	½	1	4
8 Persson	g	½	0	0	½	½	X	0	X	0	3½
9 Van der Weide	Swe	0	½	1	½	½	½	1	X	0	3½
10 Naumann	Ned	½	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	0	3½
	Ger	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	1	X	3½

The group of players at the Golombek Memorial.

Seated l - r: Matthew Turner; Dr. John Nunn; Gerry Walsh (arbiter for the event); Cllr. Colin Charlwood, Mayor of Torbay and consort; Mark Hebden; Alexander Naumann. Standing: Tiger Hillarp-Persson; John Wheeler (Chairman of the Friends of the Paignton Congress); Robert Fontaine; Klaus Bischoff; Keith Arkell; Danny Gormally; Karel van der Weide; Steve Boniface (Arbiter); John Dunleavy (Congress Secretary); 3<sup>rd</sup> row: Alan Critchmore (successor to John as Congress Secretary); ? ; Frank Parr; Alan Maynard.





John's postscript in the event programme also tells us something of the man.

#### A POSTSCRIPT BY THE CONGRESS DIRECTOR

*Putting this tournament together proved to be a more interesting challenge than at first appeared. The late arrangement of other events in a busy chess summer took away both actual and potential players. However, in the end, we have a Category X1 tournament with which to honour the memory of Hon. GM Harry Golombek OBE and that is what I set out to achieve in the first place.*

*Five established Grandmasters will do battle with five young International Masters of high promise. Harry was ever one to encourage the younger generation and it is my belief that he would have thought this gathering of chess talent provided a fitting memorial. He would have been particularly pleased that his relatives have generously donated a substantial Best Game prize to encourage the sort of creative chess that he would have been delighted in writing about.*

*Sadly, three Grandmasters, each of whom held Harry in high esteem, were unable to accept invitations to play: Jonathan Mestel, Jonathan Speelman and Vassily Smyslov.*

*One acceptance that I was particularly pleased to receive was that of Gerry Walsh, Chairman of both The Friends of Chess and the British Chess Federation, who agreed to act as Chief Arbiter. Gerry was a long-time friend and helpmate of Harry's and was his chess executor. It is appropriate that, thanks to David Anderton, the portrait of Harry by John Bratby will hang above Gerry's desk in*

*the playing room.*

*I have been helped by many in the selection of players for this tournament and in other matters. I wish, in particular, to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of David Anderton, the BCF International Director, Egon Ditt, President of the German Federation Uwe Boensch, the German National Coach, Jean- Claude Loubatière, President of the French Federation and Kees Stap of the Royal Dutch Federation.*

*Finally, I express my thanks to my colleagues of the Paignton Congress Committee for their unfailing support in bringing this Memorial Tournament to fruition: Victor Cross (Chairman), Steve Boniface, Bill Frost, Bob Jones, Alan Maynard, Philip Trussler and John Wheeler.*

*John Dunleavy*

John was elected as Devon's Council Delegate to the West of England Chess Union in June 1996. His love of the law and the precise language of constitutions soon led him to offering to revise WECU's constitution. His first draft was accepted by the June Council Meeting 1997.

At the same meeting he stepped in as one of the Union's two delegates to the BCF Management Board. Two years later, the Federation slimmed down the Board by reducing the number of Union delegates to one, and at the June 2000 Council Meeting a choice had to be made. John came through this selection process and continued to represent the Union's interests.

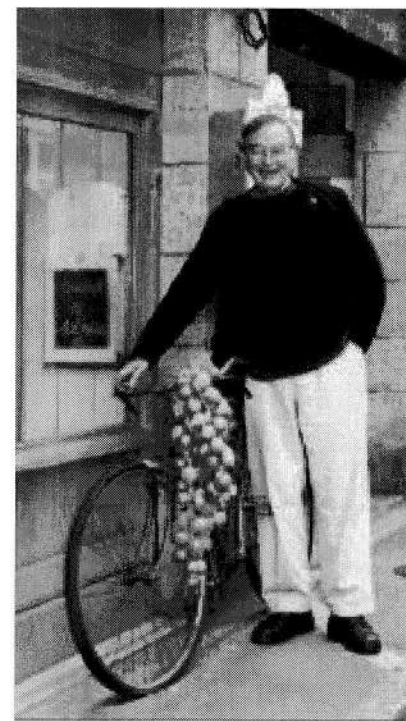
Further, more radical changes were mooted by the Federation and it was agreed that it should represent the

interests purely of England, as the other home countries already had their own national organisations. The evolution from British to English Federation demanded much careful planning and John was in the forefront of this, spending many hours, often late into the night, consulting by phone, e-mail, letter and in person, with colleagues of the sub-committee charged with expediting the change, especially the highly-experienced David Anderton, who recalls...

*“John was the most active BCF Management Board Member in dealing with the complex work to draft and finalise the Memorandum and Articles of Association and Bye Laws and Regulations of English Chess Federation. He did a lot of creative work as well as checking the drafting with great care. We spent many hours in the evenings and weekends both talking on the telephone and emailing each other. He took his responsibilities as Chairman of Governance Committee very seriously and was widely respected for his impartiality.”*

This last observation will be repeated by many who knew him. In whatever activity, John knew his own mind, while at the same time being loyal to his chairman. He would never enter into internecine plots or cliques – with him everything was out in the open.

During the course of 2007 he was awarded a hat trick of life vice presidencies, of Devon, WECU and the ECF.



*On holiday in Brittany in 2003*

He was a great bibliophile, with a large collection covering history, politics, science, languages, mathematics, but particularly chess. He had several hundred chess books and a large number of ornamental sets and boards, and these were beautifully laid out in his new house in Boxgrove.

At the time of his retirement, he had discovered he was diabetic and was developing arterial disease in his legs, the latter induced by years of heavy smoking before he gave up the habit in the 1970s. He was always mindful of this, but after the new millennium his health became of increasing

concern, and they decided to move back to their home area to be nearer family members and grandchildren. In October 2007 a pleasant house was found in Boxgrove, near Chichester, large enough for John to display his extensive library. He joined the Chichester club and had started playing again that winter, when his two conditions worsened, the one fatally interacting with the other, and he was hospitalised.

While in hospital, the doctors debated what to do about his worsening leg condition. After five weeks in hospital, on 8<sup>th</sup> April he phoned ECF President Gerry Walsh on his bed-side pay phone. When Gerry asked what he wanted, John said – “Nothing in particular – let’s just talk till the phone card runs out”, which they did. After half an hour the line suddenly went dead, as the credit on his card had indeed run out. The next day, John died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack – as if his own card had run out.

On the morning of the funeral, as family members foregathered at the house, John’s two grandsons took out one of his more spectacular chess sets and calmly played a quick game. Joan observed that they were thus in a peaceful mindset when the party set off for the crematorium.

John would have been very happy with that.

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