

NCCU HISTORY
History of the counties who
constitute the NCCU

Cumbria Chess Association

(Taken from 'A Short History' by M.J. Armstrong)

The first mention of organised chess playing in the Cumberland region was during the 1840's, at the Mechanic's institutes in Whitehaven and Workington, Carlisle Library and the Athenaeum club in Maryport. Indeed the first actual chess club was at Carlisle in 1870. The club contested its first match in 1871 against a group of players from Whitehaven. 1883 saw the formation of chess clubs in Maryport, Cockermouth and Whitehaven. It was players from these three clubs and Carlisle and Workington who comprised the first representative Cumberland team which, on 8th March 1884, met a team from Newcastle and Gateshead at Carlisle, the away team winning 13.5-10.5.

On the 9th August 1884 a meeting was called at Workington which resulted in the formation of the Cumberland County Chess Association, with Dr. R. Walker of Carlisle as its first president.. The first victory for the Cumberland team came on 20th February 1886, when a 16.5-13.5 victory was gained over a Bradford team.

It is notable that the league match between Workington and Maryport in 1888 was probably the world's first chess match played by telephone.

Cumberland sent three delegates to a meeting in Manchester on January 28th 1899, which, alongside delegates from Northumberland, Westmorland, Durham, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, produced the formation of the Northern Counties Chess Union. The first secretary of the NCCU was a Mr. Charles Platt, president of the Carlisle Club.

Cumberland played their first NCCU county match on the 18th January 1902 in Carlisle, losing 14-8 to Yorkshire. Cumberland played in the NCCU competition until 1907, when travel proved too big a burden. It was to be 47 years before Cumberland played in a NCCU county competition again.

The records show numerous gallant Cumbria defeats at the hand of NCCU counties. However a draw was gained (8-8) against Northumberland in 1970 and then, at last, in 1972, Cumbria clinched their first NCCU victory (8.5-7.5!) against Northumberland. (A Cumberland team did beat a Lancashire team in a friendly match held in Carlisle on the 2nd February 1935).

Travel problems have always limited the extent of Cumbrian participation in NCCU County matches, which explains why Cumbria were pioneers in correspondence chess. Their first match was against Northumberland in 1904/5, resulting in a narrow victory (14-13) over 27 boards.

The Cumberland Association ceased functioning during the first World War and did not resume until 1923. when it did, the individual championships proved as strong as ever. Of interest was that to play in the Cumberland Individual Junior championships, players had to be under 30 (!) years of age.

In 1938 the Cumberland Chess Association amalgamated with the Westmorland Chess Association. Around 1953 Lancashire and the NCCU agreed to a 'transfer' of Barrow which

allowed the formation of the Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness Chess Association in 1958. In 1974 this title was changed to the Cumbria Chess Association.

Compared to other counties of the NCCU, not many chess congresses were held in the Cumbrian region apart from Keswick in the 1960's and Millom in the early 1980's. The South Lakes congress was initiated 1997 and is now in its 3rd year.

A 10 year old Ian Wells played in the 1973-74 Cumbrian Minor Individual Championship,. Within a few years he was playing for the Cumbrian first team, and in 1979 played in the British Championship. tragically he died in 1982, and was awarded the posthumous title of FIDE master by the International Chess Federation.

Windermere won the Cumbrian Team Championship nine times in succession during the 1970's, with John Toothill as top board throughout this period. John became an International Correspondence Chess Master in 1983.

Cumbria may not have had glorious success within the NCCU over their first 100 years, but their participation has overcome the obstacles of distance and travel to make them as much an important member of the NCCU as any other county.