

Brustkern, J., and Wallet, N., 2022. *The Chess Battles of Hastings: Stories and Games of the Oldest Chess Tournament in the World*. Alkmaar: New In Chess.

I am grateful to David Elwood, one of my opponents in All Play All 113, and my team captain in the 7th British Webserver Tournament (sorry about my results, Skip) for bringing this book to my attention and suggesting it for review.

By happy accident I have the hardback edition. I looked on Amazon and it was not far short of £30 which I thought a bit steep. However, Books of London had it for sale as an Amazon seller for quite a bit less and so I placed my order. I was expecting the paperback edition but was very pleasantly surprised when, the following week, the hardback edition landed on my doormat.

The first hundred pages are British chess history starting with the London 1851 tournament then focussing on Hastings. Brustkern is careful to locate his chess history within the social circumstances of the time rather than seeing chess as existing outside of society. Nevertheless, there is room for a little of what I call 'heroic history' and the key roles of figures such as Herbert Dobell are discussed.

The bulk of the book consists of mini-biographies of players with an association with the Hastings tournament together with whole or part games. Some of these portraits are of 'the greats' such as Bronstein, Tal, Larsen, and Keres. There is also a good, but not overwhelming, British contingent including Short, Nunn, Speelman, and Chandler from modern times going back through to Mieses and Sir George Thomas.

Especially welcome is the inclusion of portraits of some female players. Menchik and Judit Polgar get their own sections. There is also a bit on Nona Gaprindashvili although this is, somewhat disappointingly contained in a story about Tal.

Lastly there are nice pieces about players we might all have heard of but who rarely take a starring role in chess books. Among these can be found Szabo, who won Hastings four times, which is more than anyone bar Flohr (also four wins) and Gligoric, who won five times.

The final chapter, entitled 'Appendix' contains a list in chronological order of the top three finishers in each year's tournament from the beginning in 1895 to 2004 followed by the winner only subsequent to that year.

I formed the impression that this was a book made by putting together a set of shorter pieces rather than a book which emerged whole as originally intended. However, it is none the worse for this. The history parts I read in one sitting when I ought to have been busy with other things, and I find myself dipping in to the sections about the players and playing through the games. Since I bought it, the book has not left the side of my chess set. I do not think I can give it greater praise than that. If you like chess history, or enjoy reading about past tournaments and the players who participated in them, then this book is a good buy.

Adam Spencer