

The Hinckley Tales (The Prologue)

When April with its sweet and sudden showers
Has filled our southern gardens bright with flowers,
When [Richard James](#) delights us with the view
From Richmond or from Twickenham or Kew
And when [John Saunders](#) counters tourist bands
By travelling himself to foreign lands,
When fit [Steve Giddins](#) journeys to West Humble
And there gets ready with his friends to ramble
Past picnic places famed from Austen's Emma -
In Liverpool they're facing a dilemma:
While [David Robertson](#)'s in Paradise
His unkempt garden sadly pays the price.
Unmown, untended, aquilegia'd, moss'd,
Dave's own suburban paradise is lost.
His mind's engaged around that time of year
Remembering that cut-off, June, is near.
Folk anxious to improve their grade or rating,
Whate'er their "starting grade" or their "K-weighting",
And specially from every shire's end
To Hinckley Island's fair hotel they wend
To pit their wits, and stamina as well,
Against each other in 4NCL.
And so I gathered there in early May
Some four and twenty souls intent to play
For honour, rating points, and some conditions.
I'll now describe them all. Any omissions
Are mine alone. But if you watched them play
I bet you too would be quite worn away.
Now, having sent Dave packing, I shall post
A rhyme or two about this motley host
I see them off to bed each weekend night
So they'll be fresh next day and not play shite,
Like some who drink all night till sparrow fart
And at a (k)night I'll therefore make a start.

1. The Knight

There was **an ageing knight**, distinguished man,
Who, from the day on which he first began
To play this noble game in '72
Had been a David who Goliaths slew.
He'd rapidly progressed (and no-one faster)
To International Master, then Grandmaster.
He'd played for his and his own country's honour,
Disheartened Tinman, made kebab of Donner
And been the executioner and slayer
Of many an even stronger player.
He took board three gold medal in Dubai
And helped the team to second place thereby.
He had done nobly in this game of war,
He'd been to eighty countries, no man more,

As well in Christian as in heathen places,
Played his guitar with rhythmic, heavy basses,
He'd lately turned his mind to politics
But found corruption and good chess don't mix.
Though standing tall, this knight be quite Short,
Especially when called on to report
The latest outrage from the ruling body,
Describing their performances as "shoddy"
(I use advisedly an under-statement),
Although that sadly led to no abatement;
So, calling them a bunch of f***** w*****,
This knight retired and joined the senior rankers.
And then, guitar and good red wine in hand,
He visited the Cape and Griqualand
And swam with sharks, devising vicious schemes
To kill opponents in World Senior Teams.
Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
(or so he told me – was it merely jest?)...
...I think that I had better leave the rest.

2. The Squire

And with him was a fine young English squire,
Who played all games with great panache and fire.
Though by his name you'd think he came from Wales,
He hailed from Keighley by the Yorkshire Dales
In stature he was of a handsome length,
With tactical ability and strength.
No wine for him, but ale in hearty flagons
Which helped breath fire into his favoured dragons
And brought him many wins in little space.
His stirring victories brought him a place
Beside the ageing knight in England's cause
Fighting the heathen foes in foreign wars.
A champion of England and Bunratty,
His style baroque, with echoes of Scarlatti.
Despite his youth he'd travelled overseas
In Ireland, Italy, Antipodes -
Wherein he'd found his lady, sought her hand
And brought her back into his native land.
And as befits a penny-watchful Tyke
He'd try to travel everywhere by bike.
Courteous he was and calm and able
(Though likely to eat all the food at table),
A warrior fierce and loyal, in the strain
Of his most famous namesake, Sir Gawain.

3 The Yeoman

There was a young French yeoman by his side;
From Poitiers he hailed. He seemed to glide
Across the floor with enigmatic smile
Between each move - a prince of Hinckley Isle
Clad in the latest fashion. Though he dressed

Often in black, you'd think that he'd detest
That shade, for he'd tell everyone in sight
That he had only mastery of White.
With t'other colour he'd do something daft.
Although he was a champion of his craft,
He'd gathered from the past his every blunder.
His book was at the stall in the rotunda:
"The Manual of Avoidable Mistakes"
Was selling like proverbial hot cakes.
While Guildford has had many personnel
From France, that some might call us Arsenal,
With Brunner, Gazza, Mazé and Lagarde;
Fransoa, MVL as a wildcard,
Of none of them we're such an aficionado
As of our (newly Catalan) Edouardo.
Of him the Company had but one request:
This season give those needless slips a rest.

4. The Mark

A Mark there was, one of the finest sort
Who went about the country seeking sport
In weekend tournaments. He made his living
Mainly through winning prizes and by giving
Some coaching lessons to the younger players.
He still persisted with (despite gainsayers)
The London System, K.I.D. And Barry.
He knew them all so well, he wouldn't tarry -
Just make his move and rush out for a drag
Or two or three upon another fag.
Although you wouldn't guess it from his play
He knew the modern world's more spacious way,
But did not rate most texts at a plucked hen
Which memorise lines far beyond move ten.
And I agreed and said his views were sound;
Why study thus until one's head goes round?
He'd found a better way to make his Mark
By memorising Fine and Averbakh.

5. The Women's Champion

There was a lady, former women's champ,
A femme fatale (or, some would say, a vamp)
Upon the chequer board. Time and again
She'd slowly outmanoeuvre all the men.
And she was known as Miss Antoaneta,
Although those lucky few who knew her better
Could call her Ety. She would dress in leather
Skirt, jacket, boots in cold or clement weather.
She'd move, then saunter out in light or dark
To share a drag of weed with old Sir Mark.
She seemed, as black or white, content to halve
The points. Her favourite Chebanenko Slav
Was passive, tempting rasher foes to folly,

While, playing white, her slow and solid Colle
Would dull opponents' wits – until they found
Her endgame skills at last. Down they'd be ground.
She'd show no sentiment or tender heart
But play remorselessly to their depart.
She liked to eat Italian food ,or Thai -
For Spicy Soup of Coconut she'd cry
In Ullesthorpe's fine house The Dirty Duck.
You think you stand a chance with her? Tough luck.

6. The Chess Coach

There was a chess coach, jovial and merry,
A gambiter, a very festive fellow.
In all of Bramley there was none so mellow
So glib with gallant phrase and levity
He'd published many a video and CD.
He'd taught the children of his native county
To play at chess. For this he got a bounty
Hardly sufficient for a decent living.
For chess is not a game that keeps on giving,
At least in the pecuniary sense
For teachers there get little recompense.
But Merry [Andrew Martin](#) wouldn't hurry:
His only wants in life a good Thai curry,
Some good real ale and playing summer cricket
Whacking the ball to the remotest thicket,
Chortling "not out, not out!" My, how he romped
Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
To commentate at any British tourney
(For a small fee, hotel room and the journey),
Never appearing as your chess bred scholar
With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,
But much more like a captain of the club
Who loved his bat and ball, his beer, his grub
So much he had to spend the morning swimmin'
So he could keep in shape. Thus all the women
Would leave young sons and daughters in his care
To learn to win, to lose but not to swear.
He was an International Master.

6. The Merchant

Then, face as innocent as village pastor,
A Trouble Merchant next, a jackanapes
Delighting in his little jokes and japes.
His parents had instilled in him a passion
For music and, in some degree, for fashion.
He'd always wear expensive shirt and jacket;
And other raiment priced in upper bracket
Down to his feet, in modish leather boots.
He'd tell of his opinions and pursuits
In solemn tones, and how he never lost
So we should keep him at whatever cost.

Then he could say no more, but burst out laughing
At our shocked faces, saying “merely chaffing!”
While just a boy he'd played at Wijk-an-See
And gained his GM title on the way.
He was a fellow prodigy with Giri
And, like Anish, always polite and cheery,
Tho' Robin Goodfellow, “that knavish sprite”,
Like namesake Puck would ever take delight
In playing tricks and seeking different ways
To serve us with his Sauces Hollandaises.

7. The Economist

A young economist, a student still
Who'd read from Keynes and Friedman back to Mill,
A keen theoretician he and easy
Discussing Armin Falk and Uri Gneezy
Or other seminal Behaviourists,
Was there and duly entered in the lists.
He hailed from Brisbane, Queensland's legal centre,
By no means though a coarse banana bender,
He'd been to, first, church school and then to college
In Melbourne. He had such a thirst for knowledge
He'd gained the title of John Monash Scholar,
Decided then to earn his Aussie dollar
By entering the Treasury of Australia
And helping them avoid a banking failure.
To learn how Europe had so overspent,
To study more, to Holland he'd been sent.
So economic theory filled his speech
And he would gladly learn and gladly teach,
Combining study with some other duties
Which always seemed involving somehow beauties.
A lecherer he was, I heard him say
Or maybe it was lecturer. The way
These Aussies talk it's difficult to tell;
And ever since he'd met his German belle
He'd done his best to put her at her ease
By writing Sonnets from the Portuguese.
He had a hollow look, a sober stare;
He was not fat, had lost most of his hair.
I blame that Manuel, whose fruit juice diet
Was for his liver's good. He made Dave try it.

8-12 GM and Students

A young Grandmaster and his students filled
Five places in our party. This small guild
Were aiming to become a lasting feature,
And all turned out as smartly as their teacher.
He had achieved while still a [Pert](#) young lad
World Championship in Spain. He'd also had
Success elsewhere abroad and more at home.
His style of play was like a metronome,

Slow paced and steady, gaining inch by inch
Squeezing opponents in the vital clinch.
Though valorous, he'd thought there'd be discretion
In seeking out a different profession,
But found, alas, that actuaries still have
A life more dull than teachers of the Slav.
So he'd decided to create a pool
Of bright young pupils at a Public School
Named for the Duke who won at Waterloo
And there he drilled these students through and through
In strategy, manoeuvre and defending
And finally in winning in the ending.
These Sandhurst Scorpions made grown men quail -
Their fatal sting was not just in the tail.
He'd managed to recruit, this sly young fox,
Sons of a hooded bear, three Goldilocks.
The youngest of them, Alex, Mighty Atom,
Played like the Iron Duke - "Up guards and at 'em!"
While [Anthony](#), Akshaya gained Nick's praise
By following his French and Slav-ish ways,
Young Matthew came from leafy Maidenhead
and only knew the Iron Duke was dead;
He had to study modern history
So Pitts and Wellesleys were a mystery.
Now - having learnt from Nick how to manoeuvre
Like Wellington - he'd added to his oeuvre
Attacking flair like that ami of Bony,
Davout. He'd started playing the Benoni.
Still learning, he occasionally went splat,
Unlike the conqueror of Auerstadt,
But balanced with fine victories to his name,
Predicting a great future in the game.

13 & 14 – Two older students

Two older students joined us in the bar;
Each had been in his time a junior star.
The one, who trained to be an engineer
In some degree, would always try to steer
Proceedings into violent attacks
With sacrifices aiming to pole-axe
The enemy king. He'd drive opponents mental,
Though out of battle he was sweet and gentle.
Yang-Fan was now at Churchill in the Fen -
A fine establishment for Cambridge men
Who seek a quiet and bucolic view,
Away from life and fun and things Dark Blue.
The other one, with shock of flaming hair,
You'd think he'd also be devil-may-care,
But he, taught well indeed at Dunelmensis,
Instead had learnt the science of defences.
Now working for a small finance boutique,
Young Callum worked long hours throughout the week

And so, alas, had little time or less
To study or to play the game of chess.

15. The IT Expert

An expert artisan, a Guilders man
Was also with us, often in the van,
And leading from the front his worthy pards
For he could set at nought Wood Green wild cards.
He was so trim and fresh, with shiny head
And piercing stare. Opponents' plans he read
As if he knew their every private thought.
He lived abroad in Holland, Amersfoort
But came to England for this competition.
He was a man of learned erudition
And cheerful; if you saw his face in shrouds
It merely meant his thoughts were in the Clouds
Dreaming of VM Ware by Zuider Zee,
For he was such an expert in IT
He made his living hiring out his knowledge.
He gave the impression often of a college
Professor with his donnish gaze, his specs
And with his massive cerebral cortex.
And while opponents perished one by one,
He'd broadly smile and said he played for fun.
He loved good food and wine, taught by his mother
Who was of good French stock, so in another
Life he'd be a cook or a sommelier.

16 The Wife of Montpellier + 17 Husband

A worthy woman, coming from Montpellier
Was with us, five times champion of France
Then played abroad, and so by lucky chance
She met young Flear in 1986
And proving that both love and chess can mix
They married, had two sons and stayed together
Unlike so many chess-pairs who untether.
For while chess players' brains may be outsize
They've seldom learnt the art of compromise.
In company she liked to laugh and chat
So everyone she met would comment that
She had a pleasant nature - to conceal
(when playing chess) an inner heart of steel.
She was an expert in the ways of men
And jokers called her Monarch of the Glenn.
Her husband fought at Hastings without fear
'Gainst all but her - "perhaps a draw, my dear?"

18-20 The Sisters + Husband

Two sisters with their husbands joined our crew,
And they had four young offspring with them too.
So, while the women and one man would play,

The other husband had to spend all day
Devising ways to entertain the childer
Without them getting over-tired and wilder.
A mammoth task it was, but he was saved
By all the youngsters being well-behaved.
Meanwhile, the sisters played a pantomime
Of going slowly, squandering their time,
And only started moving in a hurry
With 30 seconds left. Then in a flurry
Of tactics they would reach the 40 mark,
Leaving their poor team captain in the dark.
A win, a loss on time, perhaps a blunder?
All these could happen. Is it any wonder
The captain thought it better not to watch
But haunt the bar and nurse a double scotch?
The husband playing didn't stretch the nerve;
He played with calmness, even with reserve.
He had no problems with opponents sending
The contest into hard or simple ending,
With confidence that there he could outplay 'em
And slowly wear them down -and then he'd slay 'em.

21-24 The Four Stalwarts

We had with us four Stalwarts of the game
With many great successes to their name,
Not just in chess, in other fields as well,
In which endeavours too they would excel.
First Russell, chiselled from a block of Granat
His openings were from another planet,
His main career a veritable fountain
Of knowledge about tax and on accounting.
An Irishman, a general knowledge wizz
Gave no-one else a look-in at a quiz,
And showed extensive skill in other languages
While nicking everybody else's sandwiches.
Another played aggressive variations
Which always seemed to end in complications;
In conversation he would underscore
His points in rasping voice and semaphore.
Last, but not least, a tall and balded gent -
It seemed to me that everywhere he went
He'd try to sell the latest trick he'd got
Whether the target had some cash or not.
O'er time he'd made a pile of filthy lucre
From selling things like LIVED™ and VUCA
Which sound impressive and (better by far)
You'd no idea of what such products are.
You needed him to understand the gist:
He was the perfect HR alchemist.
All his consultants, gathered in a tribe,
Were ready with the programmes he'd prescribe
And many companies, both large and small

In rudest health, would say they owed it all
To ministrations from AD&C.
He'd subsidised for years our company
And now he'd reached retirement age his aim
Was getting more enjoyment from the game
By trips abroad to Jersey and Gibraltar.
His repertoire was fixed; he wouldn't alter
His Tromp Attack or Colle-Zukertort.
He was a comrade of the finest sort
Who always had uplifting, cheery words
For teammates, though they played like turds.
He'd truly be immortalised by some
As the inventor of the Monkey's Bum.

The Management Team

There gathered in this fair establishment,
A team assembled by the management
To regulate behaviour at the boards
And broadcast moves to eager foreign hordes.
The **Broadcast Master** was a pleasant chap
And no disaster got him in a flap.
He seemed to run the whole thing on his tod.
Though you might think that course of action odd,
He liked to play Lone Ranger. People saw
It worked so well, that all said "Clayton, more!"

There were some **Piemen** with him there. Oh brother!
Many a load of food one time or other
They must have eaten at their evening meal.
They all wore baggy trousers to conceal
Their ample stomachs and their hollow legs.
They'd drain each cask or bottle to the dregs.
At each round's start they would lay down the law,
Then slowly fall asleep and gently snore.
No wonder that with such a trencher diet
They found it quite beyond them to be quiet.
They'd bid spectators silent as wood elves
Then mutter noisily among themselves:
Unfortunately some of them were veering
Towards that aged state called "hard of hearing".
But they were honest workers without fee
So folk forgave their foibles – usually.
When rounds were done, these Piemen could be found
At their own table with another round
Where, so relieved that things had turned out fine,
They'd celebrate in cider and in wine -
And as for ale, they'd down it with the best.

There was a **Skipper** too, from the far west.
Ey came from somewhere near the River Torridge
And always looked to need ten bowls of porridge

To fill em up to proper pieman size
For none would think em pieman in that guise.
I say a skipper, for ey'd never stay
Still in one place. Eir thoughts would oft away
in some numerical delight or fancy.
Force em to sit too long, ey'd get all antsy.
Ey'd play all games, tho' ne'er took long to study,
But move at reckless pace. Eir cheeks were ruddy
With mop of auburn hair when ey was hale,
And taking care lest ey become too pale.
Ey was a Fellow of the Piemen's Guild,
But, though ey sat with them, ey had the build
Which more befitted acrobats, so lean
And agile, so enthusiastic, keen
To keep eir brain eternally employed,
Ey played eir game and afterwards enjoyed
To input scores into the database,
Transmuting scribble into clear typeface.
This young inputter, master, pieman, trainer
Attacked with verve. Ey was an entertainer,
Who had such varied skills ey truly made
A veritable Jack of every trade.

Our Host was there, a pleasant sight to see,
For often he'd been sent to Daventry.
He welcomed all and sundry to the place.
With rosy cheeks and fair and honest face,
His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide
No host was better in the countryside.
With measured speech, both wise and full of tact,
There was no manly attribute he lacked.
What's more he was a merry-hearted man.
After some drinks he jokingly began
To tell us that he planned to publish tales
And photos by some wily cove from Wales.

This **Journalistic Cove**, a bold name-dropper,
Told tales alright. My, he could tell a whopper.
His Facebook photo made him out to be
Nearer to twenty one than sixty three.
At twenty one he'd been a party-giver
So people called him Saunders of the Liver,
He'd been a long-haired, guitar playing twitcher,
Well used to downing spirits by the pitcher,
But now, alas, the years had taken toll,
He could no longer be a party soul
But do the best he could of making merry
Through periodic thimblefuls of sherry.
So, feeling sorry for the chap, we said
By all means let him write the tales instead.
We only sought the one condition – that
He kept out any reference to CAT.

The journalist decided on the spot
To list the League's achievements from year dot.
First came Invicta Knights. Their captain dreams
Of Howells of Anguish in the other teams
As Sussex Martlets rise towards the top.
But probably like Arsenal they'll stop
Frustratingly just short of final glory -
But that's another year, another story.
The scribe droned on through Midland Monarchs, Slough,
Wood Green and Guildford. He related how
These gatherings had thriven, grown apace,
Requiring them to move from place to place,
The Bull Ring, Brum, then other midland sites
Where folk could all enjoy Tandoori Nights,
Until at last they stayed a little while
Near Leicester at the fabled Hinckley Isle.
Such stars they'd had! Old Korchnoy and young Svidler
For Beeson Gregory – that's whale 'gainst tiddler -
While Pride & Prejudice, funded by Madam's
Stud Poker winnings, they were led by Adams.
Alas for them, their pleasant dreams were lost:
The hotel boss first tried to up the cost,
Then took our host completely unawares
By claiming need for “structural repairs”.
Tho' weekends One and Two had duly been
Completed, with White Christmas in between,
Mike needed now another place to stay.
All he could find was on the blessed day
When lovers butter up their Valentine,
But luckily for him that worked out fine
For players generally are not romantics,
They far prefer pedantic dull semantics.
At least you'd think that, looking at the Forum.
Perhaps we'd all do better to ignore 'em.
And now another season's at an end.
November next to Birmingham we'll wend,
So here's to then and to rejoining battle,
And in the bar some spicy tittle-tattle
While watching sport or maybe Fred and Bing
In the surroundings of the Holiday Inn.

Now to those mentioned in this little treatise, if anything displeases them I beg them to impute it to the fault of a lack of humour on their part, for I have only written it out of my own great understanding and goodness. Peace unto you all.