
Bitesize History - People

John Miller



The above is a portrait of Mr John Miller of Lochwinnoch, in whom the game of draughts has a sturdy veteran. He is a trustworthy exponent of the game, and has done much to secure recruits to the delightful pastime. He has met at various times stalwarts of the draughts playing world, when his knowledge of the game stood him in good stead. John, too, has contributed numerous games and problems to draughts columns, and we have been singularly fortunate in being honoured with many of his contributions.

John seems to have been content to have remained all his life in his native village, and he still lives within a stone's throw of the house where he was born. It was in one of the houses known as Factory Close, on the

22nd October, 1823, that he first saw the light, and thus he is in a fair way to become an octogenarian.

He tells, with the pawky humour of the old Scotsman, of his first match for money. It was on the 1st of January in 1832. There happened to be a soiree, a teetotal one remarks John—in what served as the parish school of that day, and there was also a temperance soiree in what is the Liberal Hall at the present day. He was left in the house with other three boys—Peter Macdowell, William Miller, and Jas. Macdowell to await the "sealing" of the meetings, i.e., the home coming of the elders. John and Peter sat down to play draughts, the stake being the total amount of money belonging to the boys—1 and a half penny in all. John gained an easy victory and pocketed the spoils of the victor.

He pictured to himself the unending number of sweetmeat he could secure next day, but, alas for his schemes, Peter's mother came home and when she heard of how matters stood she promptly relieved John of his wealth and distributed it amongst the others.

Since that early escapade he has been in enumerable matches. During his long life he has had considerable experience among the older school of draughts players. In 1847 he played a match with John Drummond, who then resided at Dalry, and from that day till Drummond's death he kept up a regular correspondence with the Denny expert.

He contested all within easy distance who cared to meet him, and soon got the title of the Lochwinnoch champion. He won a blindfold match against Mr Baxter, Paisley, and also scored with eleven men against Mr B. Laird, after that gentleman had gained a first prize at the Greenock tourney. He had numerous other encounters and was always very successful.