

British Endgame Study News

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This issue. There is an account of a charming book recently published in Germany (try the study alongside before looking inside), the special number looks at a fine composer and analyst who died sadly young, and as a small bonus (not charged against subscriptions) there is a copy of Chris Ravilious's recent *BCM* study index.

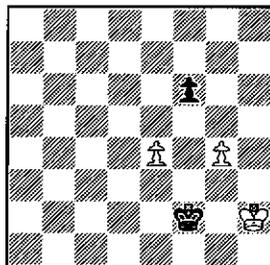
Studies and problems. Some of my recent remarks have caused me to be accused of trying to drive a wedge between problemists and study enthusiasts. Not at all. I have nothing against problemists; I used to compose problems myself, and from time to time I still do (it is vastly easier than trying to produce a decent endgame study). What I object to is the establishment and continued existence of political frameworks within which decisions relating to endgame studies can be made or dominated by people who have never composed one in their lives. Indeed, many such people seem to think it just as inappropriate that they should be expected to decide on matters in our field as I do that we should be expected to bow down and accept the results.

Spotlight. Alain Villeneuve neatly busts Marwitz's **9** in special number 62: 11...Rg1! 12 Kf2 (12 Rg8 Nf1) Ng4+ 13 Kxg1 Rxg3+ 14 Kf1 Nh2+ and Black wins.

Harold van der Heijden points out that the correction to **10** was in fact Marwitz's own; it is on page 95 of his book *Eindspelkunst*.

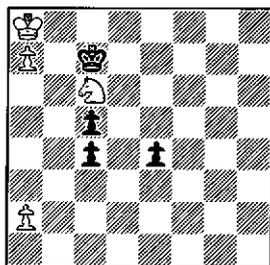
Timothy Whitworth points out that my remark about last time's study by Paul Michelet, that the bishop sacrifice on e4 appeared to be new, can be true only in the narrow sense that it had not previously been used as a preliminary to the knight sacrifice on d1. K. Lauritzen, *Nationaltidende* 1906 (page 50 of the revised edition of his book on Kubbel) had White Ka4, Bf3, Nc7, Pa2 (4), Black Kd4, Pc6/b2 (3), draw by 1 Be4 Kxe4 2 Nb5 cxb5+ 3 Ka3. Kubbel (*Wiener Mode* circa 1910) subsequently set White Ka4, Bd7, Ne6, Pa2 (4), Black Kc2, Bg2, Pa6/b2 (4), draw by 1 Nd4+ Kd3 2 Bf5+ Be4 3 Bxe4+ Kxe4 4 Nb5 etc, which may or may not have been a conscious extension of this, though now White's move to e4 is an exchange and not a sacrifice.

The sacrifice on d1 is more usually of a rook, the first being by Troitzky in 1895, and Kraemer showed a knight sacrifice in 1927. Even so, I prefer Paul's setting to all of these, and to several later versions; a modest improvement, but worth having.

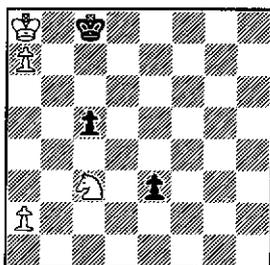


by Harold van der Heijden
White to play and win

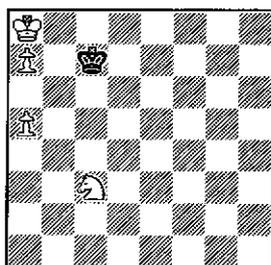
Recently published British originals



1 - win

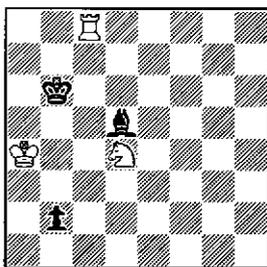


1a - after 3...e3

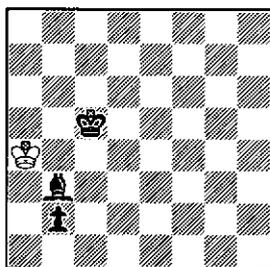


1b - after 10...Kc7

Gordon Davies, whose first published study we saw in September, has continued to compose, and I had the pleasure of putting 1 in the *March BCM*. White's king is trapped in the corner, and it will require no fewer than four tempo moves by the pawn on a2 to make Black release his grip. 1 Ne7 c3 (here and later, alternative Black moves make things easier for White) 2 Nd5+ Kc8 3 Nxc3 e3 (see 1a) 4 a3! (one) c4 5 a4 (two) Kc7 6 Nd5+ Kc8 7 Nxe3 c3 8 a5 (three) Kc7 9 Nd5+ Kc8 10 Nxc3 Kc7 (see 1b) 11 a6 (four), and we see why 4 a4 wouldn't have worked. Neatly done, and, in its four-fold form, apparently new.



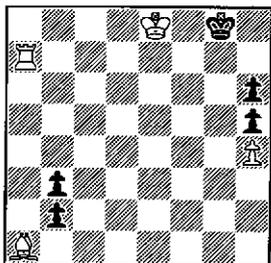
2 - draw



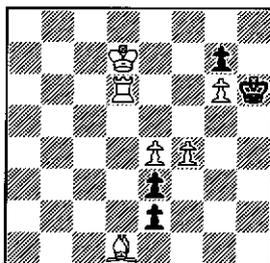
2a - after 2...Bxb3+

Paul Michelet continues to explore where many others have trodden before, and to dig out that little bit extra. 2, like 1, was in the *March BCM*. White cannot stop the pawn and the Black bishop can interpose after a skewer check on b8, but 1 Rc5! threatens a fork on b5 and 1...Kxc5 is the only sensible reply. Now the knight can give check, 2 Nb3+, and after 2...Bxb3+ we have 2a. 3 Kxb3 is obviously hopeless, but White also has 3 Ka3! after which promotion to queen or rook will give stalemate. If instead 2...Kc4 then 3 Nd2+ followed by Nb1 and if necessary Na3, and White, with a little care, will hold out. The stalemate is well known and the knight move to force ...Bxb3 has been seen before, but the preliminary rook sacrifice appears to be new.

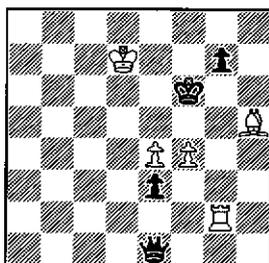
Paul has been exploring this and related stalemates in some depth, and we shall see some more fruits of his labour next time.



3 - win



4 - win (see text)



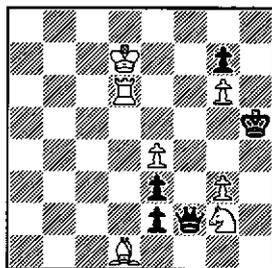
4a - after 4 Rg2

John Nunn's contribution to *A study apiece* (see the next two pages) talked about the study by Paul Cumbers and himself which we quoted in September 2006.

The story starts with 3, which John had composed in 1984 but had never published. This is a puzzle study of an unusual kind. Black to play must yield in short order: 1...bxa1Q 2 Rxa1, 1...b1Q 2 Rg7+ Kh8 3 Rg1+, 1...Kh8 2 Bxb2+. So all White has to do is wait, but it isn't so easy. Moving the king releases the pressure. 1 Bxb2 gives stalemate. Try 1 Rg7+ Kxg7 2 Bxb2+: no, 2...Kg6 followed by 3-4...Kg4, and the bishop will be overloaded. 1 Rb7 bxa1Q, 1 Ra8 b1Q, 1 Ra6 b1Q 2 Rg6+ Qxg6. Finally we try the unbelievable 1 Ra2!! burying the rook in a dead end, and we find that it works: 1...b1Q 2 Rg2+ Kh7 3 Rg7+ Kh8 4 Rg1+ neatly echoing the set play, or 1...bxa2 2 Bxb2 Kh7 3 Kd7/Ke7 Kg6 4 Ke6 and the Black king will get no further (he is a tempo behind the line 1 Rg7+ Kxg7 2 Bxb2+). Positions of this kind, where White cannot simply wait but must find a new answer to at least one Black move, are highly prized in the problem field, and are rarely seen other than in two-movers.

However, John could see no way of providing a satisfactory introduction, and he put the idea aside. In 2005, he showed it to members of a British solving team, and Paul Cumbers subsequently suggested 4. Here no reply is set for 1...e1Q, but there is more in the later play: 1 Rd2! e1Q 2 Rh2+ Kxg6 3 Bh5+ Kf6 4 Rg2 threatening 5 Rg6+ Kf7 6 Rg1+ winning the queen (see 4a) Qh4 (4...g5 5 Rxg5 Qd2+ 6 Ke8 threatening 7 Rg6 mate) 5 Rg6+ Kf7 6 Rh6+ Kg8 (6...Kf8 7 Rh8 mate) 7 Bf7+.

John describes 4 as "clearly a great improvement" on 3, and I have to say that I emphatically disagree. The loss of the set play takes away much of the impact of the first move (it now has to provide for the promotion, instead of destroying a provision already present), and the additional play in the main line is in no way adequate compensation. John subsequently added an introduction, giving 5 (1 Nf4+ Qxf4 2 gx4 Kh6 etc), and in this extended form the study won a first prize, but in truth it is no more than a typical contemporary study, with rather a lot of men on the board and no particular shape to the play. In contrast, 3 is a gem. All right, it has the character of a problem rather than of an endgame study, but it is a problem of the best kind, light, piquant, and satisfying. I had long forgotten 5; I shall not forget 3.

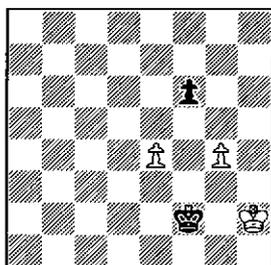


5 - win

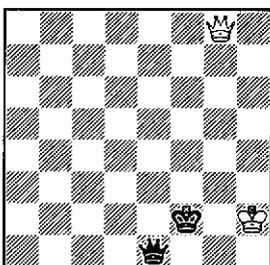
From the world at large

Our front-page problem comes from a very attractive book *A study apiece* recently put together by Gerhard Josten. I say "put together" rather than "written" because it is a collection of articles in which each of sixty contributors writes about one of his studies. Many though by no means all of the usual suspects are represented, together with several figures less well known. There are for example no fewer than three studies from Mongolia, one of which (a delightful piece of systematic movement by Sonomun Chimedtsen) I had short-listed for quotation here until I remembered that Timothy Whitworth and I had included it in *Endgame magic*.

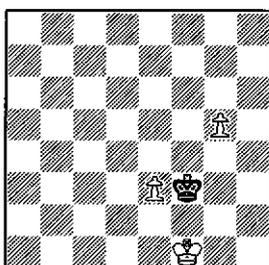
(These studies from Mongolia are in our own chess, but Mongolia had its own forms of the game which were played at least into the twentieth century and may be played still: Shatar, on an 8x8 board, and Hiashatar, on a 10x10. According to David Pritchard, quoting from *Mongolie - traditions de la steppe* by Giadda Ricci, Musée de l'Homme 1983, chessplayers occupied a place of honour in the community, and were not obliged to rise when their betters entered the yurt.)



1 - win



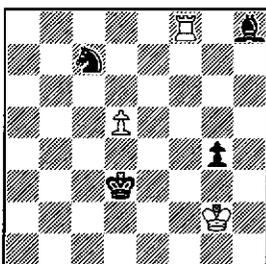
1a - 1 e5, after 5...e1Q



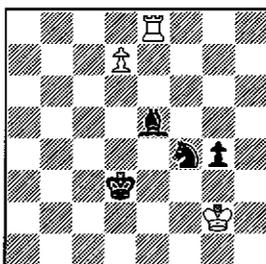
1b - 1 Kh1 Kf3, 5 Kf1

Our front-page study 1 (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 18 January 2003) comes from Harold van der Heijden's contribution. Try 1 e5: no, 1...fxe5 2 g5 e4 3-5 g8Q e1Q (see 1a), and the draw is clear. Try 1 g5: no, 1...fxg5, and if White persists by 2 e5 he will even lose. Try 1 Kh3: no, 1...Kf3 2 e5 fxe5, and White is no better off. So why is 1 **Kh1** an improvement? Ah, because after 1...Kf1 2 e5 fxe5 3 g5 we shall come down to 1a with the kings on f1/h1 instead of f2/h2, and 7 **Qg2** will be mate. As for other Black moves, 1...Ke3 is no problem (2 e5 fxe5 3 g5 etc and he will obstruct his own pawn), nor is 1...Kg3 (again 2 e5 fxe5 3 g5 and White will promote with check), but what about 1...Kf3? Once again 2 e5 (not 2 g5 fxg5 3 e5, when 3...Kf2 wins), and after 2...fxe5 3 g5 e4 4 Kg1 e3 5 Kf1 (see 1b) White's king can stop the Black pawn.

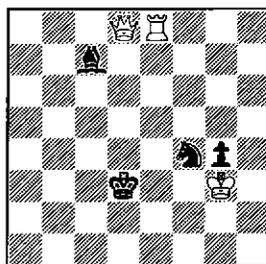
Out of interest, I asked Rafael Andrist's database-mining program Wilhelm for all the positions with $K + 2P \checkmark K + P$ where Kh2-h1 was needed to win, and it reported just two: this one, and the 1933 Grigoriev study which I quoted in September 2000. I do not know whether Harold used some such tool to find 1 (Emil Vlasák wrote about Wilhelm in *Československý šach* in February 2003, and copies of the program may have been floating around earlier), but however it was discovered it is a lovely thing.



2 - win



2a - after 3...Nf4+



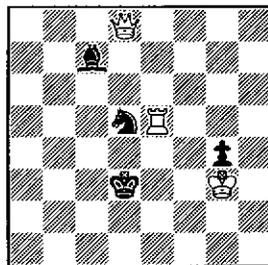
2b - after 5 d8Q+

2 (*Yediot Aharanot* 1979, version) was Amatzia Avni's contribution. The original version started at the present move 3, and he recounts that the possibility of adding the first two moves occurred to him while his car was stopped at a red traffic light.

1 d6 (1 Rxf8 Nxd5 is only drawn, so White saves his pawn first) Be5 (the only chance) 2 d7 Ne6 3 Re8 (skewering knight and bishop) Nf4+ and we have 2a. "All these moves are forced. Sometimes, when people evaluate studies they measure the level of difficulty. This study is very easy and I'm proud of that. It flows naturally and as if effortlessly, from beginning to end." It will be recalled that Levitt and Friedgood, in *Secrets of spectacular chess*, identified "flow" as one of the elements of chess beauty, and I would wholeheartedly agree.

4 Kg3 (if White does not go for the Black pawn, 4...Bc7 will draw easily) Bc7 (if instead 4...Nh5++ then 5 Kh4 Bc7 6 Kxh5 g3 7 Rg8 and 8 Rxf3, or 4...Ne2++ 5 Kf2 g3+ 6 Ke1 Bc3+ 7 Kd1 Ba5 8 Rxe2 Kd4 9 Rg2 Kd5 10 Rxf3 Ke6 11 Rd3) 5 d8Q+ (see 2b) and if 5...Bxd8 then 6 Rxd8+ Ke4 7 Re8+ and the knight will go, but Black thinks he has an answer in the cross-check 5...Nd5+! However, White has a trick worth two of this: 6 Re5!! (see 2c).

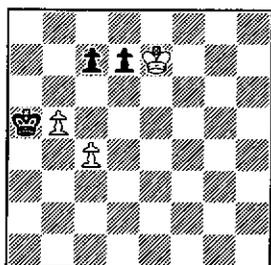
If now 6...Bxe5+ then 7 Kxf4, and Q v B + N is a standard win; if instead 6...Bxd8 then 7 Rxd5+, and everything will go.



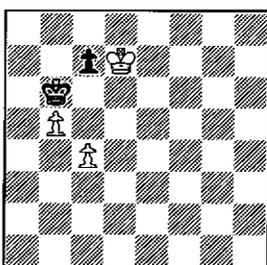
2c - after 6 Re5

A *study apiece* is published by Edition Jung (www.schachagentur.de) at 29.80 euros plus postage and packing, which for British readers is not cheap, but it is a lovely thing, attractively presented and full of content and character. Everything is in English, and a decision was made that contributions would be accepted as submitted even though only seven of the sixty contributors appear to have had English as their native language. The literary quality of the text is therefore a little variable, but only in two cases did I find difficulty in understanding it.

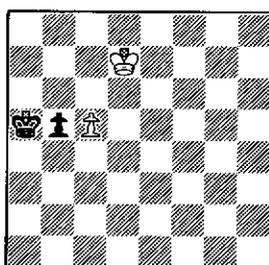
Will there be a successor? The workload will have been considerable and Gerhard has been carefully non-committal, but many well-known names are not represented and I hope a sequel will indeed materialise. Books like this are very well worth having. There will be more quotations next time, if things do not arise which clamour even more loudly for attention.



3 - win



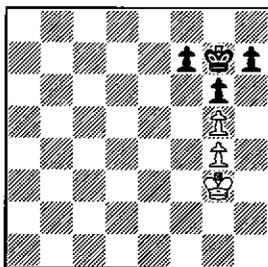
3a - 1 Kxd7, after 1...Kb6



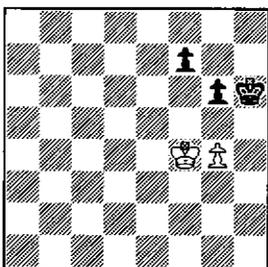
3b - 1 Kd8 c6, after 3 c5

One of the things that attracted me to *diagrammes* in the late 1980s was the supplementation of its normal fare by "special numbers" in which topics could be pursued at much greater length than was possible in an ordinary magazine article. (No, they didn't pinch the idea from *BESN*, I copied it from them.) These have been less frequent of late, but last year saw the appearance of a most appealing booklet *L'histoire authentique d'inédits sortis de l'oubli* in which Roland Lecomte wrote about the original compositions he had published during his 24 years as chess columnist of *Combat*, and about some of their composers. *Combat* was a French literary weekly, founded by Albert Camus in 1940 and initially clandestine, which seems to have survived on a shoe-string until the death of its last backer in 1974. Inevitably, most of these originals were problems, but they included some excellent lightweight studies by Vitaly Halberstadt and a couple by Alexander Selesnieff.

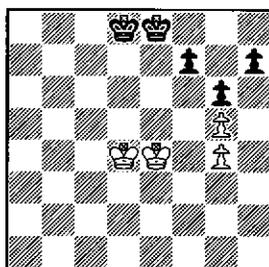
Halberstadt's delightful 3 appeared in September 1952. Try the obvious 1 Kxd7: no, 1...Kb6 (see 3a) 2 K~ c6 and draws easily. The move is 1 Kd8, and if 1...Kb6 then 2 Kxd7 and we have 3a with Black to play. If instead 1...c6 then 2 Kxd7 cxb5 3 c5 (see 3b) b4 4-6 c8Q b1Q 7 Qa8+ Kb~ 8 Qb8+, and Black's queen goes.



4 - draw

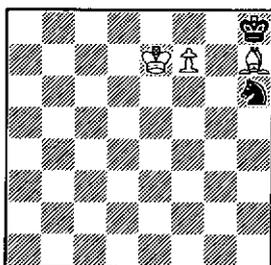


4a - 1 Kf4, after 2...Kxh6

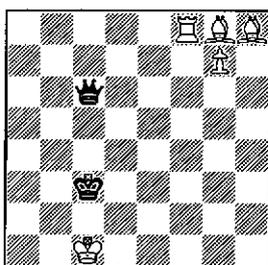


4b - after 1...Kf8/Kg8

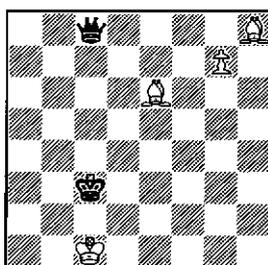
Halberstadt dedicated his 4 (February 1959) to his daughter Tania for her 17th birthday. Try 1 Kf4: no, 1...h6 2 gxh6+ Kxh6 (see 4a), and the win will be routine. But after 1 Kf3! h6 2 gxh6+ Kxh6 3 Kf4 we have 4a with Black to play, and White will draw after either 3...K~ 4 g5 (4 Ke5 also) or 3...f6 4 g5+. If instead 1...Kf8 or 1...Kg8 then White can patrol e4 and d4 (see 4b), ready to meet ...Kd7 with Kd5 and ...Ke7 with Ke5; the distant opposition doesn't matter here, the close opposition does.



5 - win, (b) Bg6, (c) Bf5



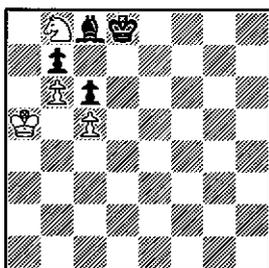
6 - win



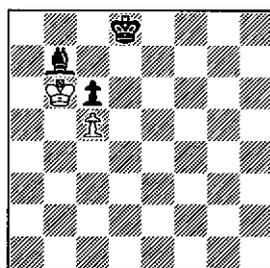
6a - after 2 Be6

The original version of Halberstadt's triplet 5 appeared in September 1952, and the version transcribed in *L'histoire authentique* has the knight on g4 with the stipulation "Black to move, White to win". In fact it seems to work perfectly well in the simpler form above. With the bishop on h7, obviously 1 f8Q+. With it on g6, 1 f8Q+ can be met by 1...Ng8+ with stalemate and 1 f8R+ by 2 Kg7 followed by perpetual check (depending on where the bishop goes, 2...Nf5+ 3 Ke8 Nd6+ or 2...Ng8+ 3 Ke8 Nf6+), but 1 f8B wins (in 1952, Halberstadt had to prove this, but Black is badly placed and according to the Thompson CD-ROM White can mate or win the knight within nine moves). And with the bishop on f5, 1 f8R+ is the promotion that works.

In Halberstadt's 6, from November 1954, White has a small material plus together with a pawn on the brink of promotion, but Black threatens immediate mate on h1, and 1 Kd1 allows a draw by perpetual check (Halberstadt spells it out). The only move to win is 1 Rc8, followed after 1...Qxc8 by 2 Be6 threatening both capture and promotion (see 6a). Hence 2...Qxe6, and we find that the two sacrifices have to be followed by an underpromotion: not 3 g8Q+ (3...Kd3 4 Qxe6 stalemate) but 3 g8B+.



7 - draw



7a - after 3 Kb6

White's knight is doomed in Alexander Selesnieff's 7, from November 1957, but 1 Nxc6+ at least gets a pawn for it. Less to be expected, after 1...bxc6, is the sacrifice 2 b7. However, Black has to capture, 2...Bxb7, and 3 Kb6 sets unexpected problems (see 7a). 3...Bc8 loses the pawn and the win, 3...Ba8 loses the bishop and the game; only 3...Kc8 temporarily preserves all Black's material, and even this is of no avail because 4 Ka7 gives him the choice of conceding the bishop or giving stalemate.

Thank you, Roland. A charming quintet, ideal for showing down at the club.

News and notices

Meetings. There will be a **Harpenden** meeting here on **Saturday June 19**, light buffet lunch 1230, endgame study chat 1400 onwards. All who receive *BESN* from me will be welcome. Please note that this will be the last of these meetings.

John Roycroft tells me that the next **Pushkin House** meeting will be on **Friday July 2** at 6.00 pm (offers of talks to roycroft@btinternet.com please). 5A Bloomsbury Square (Holborn tube, Bloomsbury Way, SW corner of the square).

PGN files of reciprocal zugzwangs and related positions (March, page 451). As I reported in last time's "Stop Press" slip, Eiko Bleicher has improved the access to these. Go to page www.k4it.de/egtb/zugzwang.php, and follow the instructions.

Jaroslav Polášek points out that most of the positions where the win takes three or more moves longer with White to play are of little interest, and perhaps the next step is to identify those where the win can be achieved *only* by navigating back to the same position with Black to play. One way would be to recalculate each tablebase with the candidate positions $P_1 \dots P_n$ for that material artificially declared as draws BTM. If only P_1 BTM is artificially declared "not won" and P_1 WTM becomes "not won", P_1 WTM can be won only by navigating through P_1 BTM, so P_1 is a position we want; if all of $P_1 \dots P_n$ BTM are artificially declared "not won", any of $P_1 \dots P_n$ which remains "won" WTM is one we *don't* want, which may remove many candidates at a stroke.

I am told that if you have a sufficiently powerful machine (which I haven't), computing a five-man tablebase now takes around ten minutes. There are positions in the file for 120 five-man material combinations. 120 "all" runs of ten minutes each would reduce the present 122,233 positions to a short list, and a ten-minute run on each position in the short list would decide its status. Six months of work, perhaps?

Guy Haworth has been thinking along similar lines in more general terms, and Jaroslav and Emil Vlasák may be attacking the problem another way.

Bob Burger sends a note from California regarding **A. H. Branton**, two of whose studies were quoted in our special number 61. "The two Branton studies you quote are memorable to me, as they were republished in *The California Chess Reporter* (of which I was an editor for 25 years....). We lost track of Branton about 1960 [...] I note that Branton is listed (in 1987) in Gaige's directory. Hence he must still have been active then. I played some offhand games with him at The Mechanics' Institute in San Francisco in the period 1952-54." Bob adds that he wants to place a plaque or other memorial to Branton, and to the problemist A. J. Fink, "the other composer of merit of the Institute", so as to "at least remind our members of their heritage".

Anybody wishing to give notice in BESN of any event, product, or service should contact the Editor. There is no charge and no account is taken of whether the activity is being pursued for commercial profit, but notices are printed only if they seem likely to be of particular interest to study enthusiasts. Readers are asked to note that the Editor relies wholly on the representations of the notice giver (except where he makes a personal endorsement) and that no personal liability is accepted either by him or by any other person involved in the production and distribution of this magazine.