

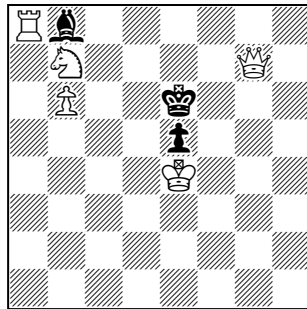
Tony Lewis 1933 - 2012

I was unable to pay my respects to Tony Lewis by attending his funeral, so let me post a brief tribute here.

Tony (he was genuinely named thus, it wasn't just an affectionate diminutive) was a leading figure on the British chess problem scene for nearly half a century, whether as solver, composer, or administrative worker. I don't think he ever competed in a World Chess Solving Championship (they didn't start until he was well into his forties, and solving against the clock is a young man's game), but as a solver of classical direct mate problems at leisure he was at his peak unrivalled in this country and scarcely equalled anywhere.* He and Sally used to compete as a pair in the annual postal solving competitions of the British Chess Problem Society (BCPS), Sally doing the two-movers and Tony the longer problems (an enquiry as to whether this would be permitted received the pragmatic reply that there would be no objection provided that they paid two subscriptions), and in the days before computer testing, when a fair number of unsound problems found their way into print and a solver aiming for the championship had not only to find the composers' intended solutions but all the unintended solutions as well, they regularly won with a score of at or near to 100%. If Tony said that he could not find a cook to a problem, even a difficult and complex problem in four or more moves, you could be pretty sure that no cook existed.

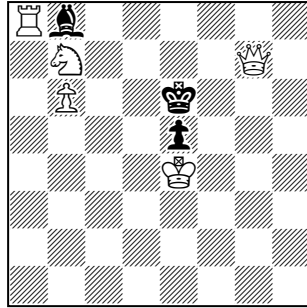
As a composer, he produced problems which were always piquant and usually lightly set, a recipe which tends to show the chess problem at its best. Here is a typical example, and since his problems are most fully appreciated by being solved we will terminate this page here and continue on a new one.

Tony Lewis
The Problemist, 1985



White to play and mate in two

* Christopher Jones and Paul Valois tell me that he did take part in one WCSC, in 1983.



White to play and mate in two

A solver of any experience doesn't start by trying checks or any other of the normally strong moves recommended in books on practical play; he looks first to see what *Black* could do if it were his move, and whether White already has a mating reply. Here, we see that the Black king has no moves, and that his bishop has only three; but 1...Ba7 and 1...Bc7 allow the White rook through to e8, and 1...Bd6, while it prevents this mate (2 Re8+ Be7), blocks d6 and so releases the White knight from the duty of guarding this square, allowing it to mate on d8.

So all White has to do is to play a waiting move that doesn't disturb anything, but this isn't so easy. RxB gives stalemate, and any other rook move abandons the potential mate by Re8. A knight move gives the Black king a flight square, which will spoil everything; a queen move gives him one flight square at least; and a king move gives two flight squares and lets the pawn move into the bargain.

Hmm. The solution is 1 Ra6, making no threat and apparently burying the rook behind an immobile pawn. However, again Black's bishop has to move, and 1...Ba7 and 1...Bc7 now bring the pawn to life and allow mate by 2 PxB in place of the previous Re8. Its third move, 1...Bd6, is met by 2 Nd8 as before.

Tony used to specialize in problems of this kind, where all White apparently had to do was nothing, but in fact every White move spoils something and an unexpected new mate or set of mates had to be found. This particular example was quoted by Jonathan Levitt and David Friedgood in their book *Secrets of Spectacular Chess* as an example of "paradox", and I think it both appropriate and revealing that they should have chosen a problem of Tony's to illustrate paradoxes of this particular kind.

But there was a downside to all this. Problems of this kind had already been intensively explored, and Tony's normal aim, of presenting a piquant change of mates in as light and elegant a setting as possible, was particularly vulnerable to "anticipation" (where a composer produces a problem independently and in good faith, only to find that somebody else has already discovered and published it). The chessmen impose their own logic, and if two composers hit on the same idea, and try to set it as lightly and economically as possible, they are surprisingly likely to come up with exactly the same position. Take the example above. Suppose that we have independently decided to try for this effect (a White rook is ambushed behind a Black bishop so that its move will allow the rook through to mate, but there is no waiting move, and the rook must ambush itself behind an immobile pawn instead). This theme requires a White rook on a8 and a Black bishop on b8 (if the White rook is not cramped against the side, it will be able to make a waiting move on the rank), a White pawn on b6, something on b7 to block this pawn, and the Black king on e6 or some point east. We need a reply to 1...Bd6 both before and after the key, and if we put the Black king on e6 the bishop's move to d6 will block this square and release a White knight from the duty of guarding it (experienced composers look for this mechanism almost automatically); furthermore, if we put this knight on b7, it will serve also to block the White pawn, and save us from having to use another man to do so. We need to prevent the Black bishop from moving beyond d6, so let us put a Black pawn on e5, and then we need a White pawn on e4 to block this pawn and incidentally to guard two squares in the Black king's field (d5 and f5) ... no, why not use the White king, which has to be placed on the board anyway and will do the job just as well? This leaves d7/e7/f7/f6 to be guarded, which a White queen on g7 will do, and because it has to guard squares on two different lines the chance that it will be able to provide an unwanted second solution is greatly reduced. So we see that if any previous composer had had this particular idea and had tried to set it as simply and economically as possible, there is a very good chance that he would have produced either exactly this setting or a left-to-right reflection of it. Inevitably, therefore, a fair few of Tony's problems proved to have been anticipated, but enough were new for his efforts to have been thoroughly worth while.

And Tony wasn't just a first-class solver of problems and a polished composer of them. He was also a hard-working administrator, one of those who do the drudgery which enables other people to enjoy themselves. He was BCPS treasurer for some fifteen years, and in so far as I could judge from working alongside him as the society's librarian he performed the distinctly burdensome duties of this post reliably and efficiently. And he was a natural gentleman, who, whenever he visited us, always slipped out quietly into the garden when he wanted a cigarette.*

I don't know if there are plans to publish a selection of his best problems (no, I am not offering to do the job – apart from any other consideration, I do not have the detailed knowledge of the field needed to weed out the problems which have proved to have been largely or wholly anticipated), but I hope that such a selection will eventually materialize. Not only will it be a deserved tribute to a fine man, but it will give a great deal of pleasure to its readers. It is all too often the curse of the chess problem to be clever without being entertaining. In Tony's hands, it was usually both.

* I cannot resist quoting Jonathan Levitt, in a quite unsolicited response to my original posting of this tribute: "...he was always a lovely man to have any dealings with, even when he was simply asking for a subscription."