

Witney OTB Rapidplay – 24th September 2023

A brief report for ChessMoves by Carl Portman

I decided to venture forth and play some competitive OTB chess for only the third time this year. I did not wish to sacrifice an entire weekend, thus a Rapidplay would be the perfect antidote to my stay at home, play online habit. Besides, it was good to get out and meet real people again and catch up on what they have been up to 'out there' in the big wide world.

Mike Truran is the brains behind this event, held at Cokethorpe School in Witney. The drive into the school grounds is always pleasant, with a tree-lined lane, adorned on the left-hand side with a giant wooden peacock. I am not sure why this bird is represented there but it certainly makes an impression.

There were six rounds, and the time control in mine was 20 mins + 10 seconds per move. There was an open section plus a Junior Major and Junior Minor group.

The venue is a splendid school hall with a very high ceiling giving the place a spacious and airy feel. There was plenty of room to play. I was surprised how few entries there were to be honest, so please do support the next event here if you can. You will not be disappointed by the food on offer, hot and cold, and also the car parking is spacious so there's no reason not to play really, is there?



The excellent Witney Rapidplay venue at Cokethorpe School

Upon arrival I noted that the arbiter for the day, the ever efficient and very likeable Matthew Carr was on his own, so it was up to the players to behave and not give him too much trouble. There were a few things to attend to in the junior sections as expected but overall, I

think Matthew enjoyed the day as much as the participants. He has a great rapport with chess players, and he looked very professional too in his ECF blazer.

From a personal chess perspective, I am being very honest here. I have not played much at all and did absolutely no prep whatsoever, being too busy back at the ranch. This came home to roost, and I paid the price with possibly my worst competitive result ever with 2/6. Okay, I lost two games on time, but I was worse in both, and I tried a couple of unconventional openings which my opponents were prepared for, but it does show that a 100-metre runner cannot just rock up from the pub, and leave the starting blocks. You have to put some effort in before a tournament – at least get your openings sorted out.

I must say that I was very impressed with the youngsters who I played. I tried a Grünfeld in one game and the young man knew it backwards! That never used to happen back in the day and computers have certainly helped to significantly improve the overall standard of play of amateurs everywhere – as many stronger players will attest to.

Congratulations to the organisers, kitchen staff and participants. This is a friendly and enjoyable event that I highly recommend. Where else can you get a day's enjoyment for only a tenner?

The motto of Cokethorpe school is *Inopiam Ingenio Pensant* (They make good their needs by their wit) and there was plenty of wit from my mate Richard Beckett who saw me at the lower end of the board order, remarking so that everyone could hear 'you used to be good.' Thanks for that Richard. I will be back to right this wrong!

All of the prizewinners and images from the venue can be seen on the Witney Chess Club website here: <https://witneychess.co.uk/>