

Cambridge Christmas Friendly Tournament Report *by Vale Abbot*

T'was the month before Christmas
 And tradition does call,
 For a tourney in Cambridge,
 That's welcome to all.

Of the Heroes of Oslo,
 None could be there,
 And the Turners were absent
 (Still sweeping up hair).

But ten souls did make it,
 Seven rounds they did play.
 And when they were over
 It finished this way:

Graham won all his games,
 Still cunning and wise.
 Geoff managed five wins,
 Behind his disguise.

David Beck played strange openings,
 But got the same score.
 Imre won but four games,
 Other years he's won more.

Phil Marson returning
 From some time away,
 Like Steve Rowe, had travelled
 To Cambridge by sleigh.

On three points, Ben Pridmore,
 Who had done one better
 Than Aidan, kept warm
 In his reindeer sweater.

Roy Arnold (on one win),
 Gave us confetti this year.
 And Adelaide faced all her
 Defeats with good cheer.

And to everyone else
 Whose attendance we missed;
 Maybe next year we'll
 See your name on the list!

A Quote from the Chairman *by Geoff Hubbard* (geoff@instihost.com)

"May you live in interesting times" -- Chinese Curse¹

Some interesting things in the Othello world during the last six months:
 I chaired my first AGM as Chairman of the BOF and was confirmed in this post by the general membership (I was chosen at a Committee meeting). The rest of the Committee was re-elected. The other interesting news from the AGM is that we decided to increase the entrance fee for playing in tournaments to £10 (waged)/£5 (unwaged) to compensate for increases in the cost of hiring venues; this fee will be standard across all the Regional tournaments. (If this tournament fee increase seriously affects your interest in attending tournaments please let me know.) We hope this means that we cease losing money running the Regionals, and if we make a profit we can use it to replace our ageing analogue clocks with new digital ones.

Congratulations to David Hand for winning the British National Championship. And congratulations to the whole British Team who did really well at the World Championship and for a while had a good chance to win the team championship.

There was a meeting of the World Othello Federation in Oslo, whose minutes can be found on the WOF forum on worldothellofederation.com. There were several interesting issues raised about tournaments that needed further discussion; please go post a message to make your views heard. The most important thing that was decided was that Federations must send the results of their tournaments to the world rating list in order to be able to send full (3+1) teams to the World Othello Championship. The BOF already does this, so it will not be a problem for us, but we need to remember to keep doing it in the future.

We now have an engraved Grand Prix shield which lists all the winners of the British GP; it will be good for many more years as it is passed from winner to winner. Maybe it can be on your mantelpiece in July! Thanks to David Beck for organising this trophy.

David has also put together some great video Othello Lessons and made them available on YouTube². I was really very impressed by these videos. They are a great way to introduce people who are interested in Othello to a deeper level of the game.

Keep up the interest.

¹It's not actually a Chinese curse, but the origin of the saying seems to be too vague to be attributable to any one person.

²<http://uk.youtube.com/user/Othellolessons> or just search on YouTube for 'Othello lessons'

Patterns

by David Beck

In my first ever article I will look at patterns.

Consider the position in the diagram; this is the Kung opening (c4 e3 f6 e6 f5 c5 c3 g5 c6 d3 d6). Notice that Black's pieces form a right-angled wall surrounding the sweet 16 (the 16 squares that occupy the centre of the board).

White is forced to break through this 'wall'. As a general rule there is no good way to break through this (Leader's Flat Wall Theory). In fact, analysis of this position should find that the colour creating the wall has a slight advantage, as is the case with each position we will consider. Play continues through the sequence 12b4 b3 b5; notice that each colour is trying to gain the centre of the bunch. Once it is no longer possible to play moves that fight for the centre in this way, Black is forced onto the edge and play continues 15a5 a4 a3 b6 a6.

STOP and play out the sequences below, then try to play out the same following sequence of moves on each as above to see that they all lead to similar positions. Is the sequence in each case exactly the same?

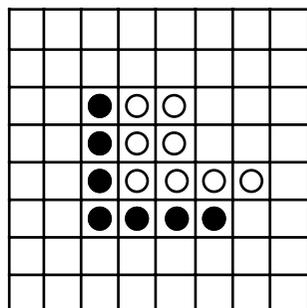
Ralle 1c4 e3 f4 c5 d6 f3 e6 c6 d3 c3

Iago 1c4 e3 f4 c5 d6 f3 d3 c3

Cat 1d6 c4 e3 f4 d3 e6 f5 f6 g5 c3 c5 c6 (1c4 e3 f5 e6 f4 c5 d6 c6 d7 f3 d3 c3? Ed.)

Brightwell 1c4 e3 f6 e6 f5 c5 d6 c6 d3 c3

What you should have found is that if you try to follow the exact same sequence for the Brightwell opening you get to an impossible position, because you have no access to b3. Why is this? Well, the move to b3 in each of the other examples is supplied by the pieces creating the Southern wall; however, in Brightwell (with this orientation) there is no wall in the South, instead the second wall is created in the North. This means that the sequence of play has to be flipped in the horizontal axis; Black's move should be 11b5 instead and White should reply 12b6 and play can continue 13b4 a4 a5 a6 b3 a3.



Kung after 11d6

Round 8: Ian Turner and Robert Stanton drew, remarkable because it was the only draw of the tournament! Meanwhile Iain Barrass showed some of the form that had won him the Grand Prix this year and finally managed to stop the unstoppable by defeating David Hand in a great game.

Round 9: Imre and Michael started neck and neck to meet David Hand in the final. Michael managed to beat Iain Barrass in a close game so it was down to how well Imre, who had not yet lost a game on day two, could do against Ben Pridmore. Ben played brilliantly to win, ending Imre's hopes of another title.

So the final was between David Hand who finished on 8/9 and Michael Handel who finished on 7/9 having only lost to Davids (perhaps *his* nickname should be Goliath). David Beck and Imre both finished on 6th and played a playoff game for 3rd and 4th place in case it was needed for World Championship selection. David managed to gain revenge for his loss in round seven and won 36-28.

The final itself was a tense and very close game, but David Hand managed to win 37-27. Thanks to Roy Arnold and Ian Turner, we were able to get an Internet connection and were able to show the final game live at www.liveothello.com (the game and accompanying spectator chat is archived there if you want to view it yourself).

Othello groupie Judith Handel, who had been cheering us on from the beginning, generously provided various tasty treats throughout the tournament as well as Pink Champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries for the winner, which along with the perpetual trophy were presented to David Hand. If there had been an award for best dressed, he probably would have won that too.

Standings after 9 rounds + 1 game final:

1. 8.0 [699.0] HAND David +1/1	5.0 [596.5] ARNOLD Roy
2. 7.0 [689.5] HANDEL Michael +0/1	10. 4.5 [596.0] TURNER Ian
3. 6.0 [682.0] BECK David +1/1	4.5 [520.0] STANTON Robert
4. 6.0 [691.5] LEADER Imre +0/1	12. 4.0 [461.5] TURNER Ali
5. 5.0 [664.0] PLOWMAN Guy	13. 3.0 [473.0] CAMPBELL Yvette
5.0 [647.0] BARRASS Iain	14. 2.0 [340.0] TURNER Kali
5.0 [640.5] HUBBARD Geoff	15. 1.0 [367.5] TURNER Tani
5.0 [619.0] PRIDMORE Ben	

The World Championship team was: David Hand, Nationals winner; Michael Handel, Nationals runner up; Iain Barrass, Grand Prix winner; Ali Turner, Highest placed woman in the Nationals.

Fortunately Kali's ankle was just sprained. So we now had a full complement of 15 players. Notably absent was Graham Brightwell who was out of the country; this is the first National Championship he has missed since 1997.

Round 3: David Hand and Michael Handel both won their games, becoming the only two undefeated players, setting the shape of things to come.

Round 4: Traditionally three rounds are played on the Saturday and four on Sunday, but we were running well ahead of time and decided to play another round with the hope that we could all start our long journeys home earlier on Sunday afternoon.

So Round 4 was the last round on Saturday and saw the battle of the current leaders with David Hand playing a perfect game from move 41 resulting in a convincing win over Michael Handel.

We went to dinner at a local Indian restaurant, which, although completely deficient in Mango Lassis despite all assurances that one was 'coming shortly,' was able to accommodate all of us.

Day 2: So, at the start of day two, David Hand had a perfect 4/4 record and seemed to be in good form, and everyone else had managed to get at least one win and many were looking optimistically at their chances with World Championship places available for the top two finishers and another spot for the highest placed female player.

Round 5: Finally the hotly anticipated battle between David and Goliath made it through the pairings, although this time Goliath was somewhat confusingly also called David. David Hand managed to continue his trend of great endgames and wrested a win from David Beck to remain undefeated.

Round 6: It was my turn to try to see whether I could beat David Hand, but again his perfect endgame play saw him take a convincing win.

Round 7: The female place on the World championship team seemed to be a competition between Yvette Campbell and Ali Turner and they met in this round, with Ali winning the game and moving slightly ahead.

After the round David Hand was well out in front and was still undefeated. Imre Leader, who had just defeated David Beck, and Michael Handel seemed to be his most likely challengers on five wins, but there was a large following group, including Guy Plowman and Roy Arnold, on four points who still had a mathematical chance of making the final if things went their ways.

So in essence the 5 openings we have considered, Kung, Cat, Ralle, Iago and Brightwell, can all continue with similar sequences of play onto the West edge. So what are the common features that makes this sequence occur in each opening?

As you can see it is usually White who creates a wall around the sweet 16; however it is possible for Black as in the Kung opening. We will for reasons of simplicity discuss the pattern as if it were always White creating this wall. We will also for reasons of simplicity use only one orientation.

Common Features:

A) White has a row of four discs creating a wall on the West edge of the sweet 16.

B) White has a second wall running at right angles and connected to the four disc wall. This wall needs to be at least three discs long to give access to White's first move of the sequence (*e.g.*, 10b3 in the Iago opening). Theoretically however this wall could run all the way to the East edge and not have any effect on the position.

C) Black should have no moves in the East or North, for two reasons.

Firstly, if Black has moves in the East it would most likely be beneficial for him to use up these moves rather than break through the wall.

Secondly, it means that no white pieces will interfere with White's quiet move to the edge (*e.g.*, in Iago 12a5)

That is effectively the basis of the position, nothing more complicated than that. You may notice that in Iago and Ralle White has an extra piece at d4. This however is of no concern since Black's move to b4 will ensure that these pieces will end up black.

Let us now turn our attention to a live game between Graham and Nick Reunes from the WOC07.

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f5 d6 c5 f4 e3 c6 d3 f6 e6 d7 g4 c4 g5 c3 b4 d2 e2 b3 b5 a5 a4 a3 b6 g3 f3
h3 h4 h5 c7 c2 d1 e7 d8 a6 h6 h7 g6 f7 e8 f8 b7 f1 e1 c1 f2 g1 g2 a7 b8 h1
h2 c8 a8 a2 b2 b1 a1 g8 g7 h8
```

This is in essence no different from the sequence we have already played. However, as you will see, the sequence doesn't immediately conform to the standard line we have played.

Consider the position after 14c3. All the features of our pattern are present, though White is slightly more developed and has more pieces on the board than in the positions we have considered up until now.

STOP 2: play through the sequence you would expect based upon the pattern we have been considering.

What you should have played out (15b4 b3 b5 a5 a4 a3 b6 a6) according to our pattern is closer to the 'correct' series of play than what was actually played during the game. The only difference is that the last move in the sequence should have been 22c7 rather than a6. However, the reason for this is outside the scope of this article.

The actual course of play deviates from our sequence further, however. Black plays our expected b4. However, White responds with d2 rather than b3 and Black is forced to alter what we are assuming is his preferred route of play. Black plays 17e2 correctly keeping shape and removing White's potential access to g6. White now plays the b3 move we were expecting two moves earlier.

STOP 3: Has the deviation in our sequence altered the position to such an extent that our preferred continuation to b5 doesn't work?

The answer is 'No;' the position still stands and we are able to continue the sequence as normal. Black's position will become central to White's. White's only quiet move after Black's b5 will be our expected a5 and as normal we can force White onto the edge. This is good for Black because it can make it hard for White to find quiet moves through the rest of the midgame. White's only option is to take the four disc edge to gain a tempo and to force Black to make some moves available elsewhere.

The thing to take away from this exercise is that patterns appear throughout the game of Othello and that they are exploitable. The advantage of this particular pattern is that if you are able to recognise it you can apply it to other situations and work through a series of moves quickly, very handy if you are short on time. Patterns are recognisable throughout the game (opening, midgame and endgame) and could be a discussion point for future articles.

It is also worth noting, however, that a pattern is often only a generalisation of a position and does not mean that playing a particular pattern through is necessarily going to be correct in every position. If you run an analysis of the openings we have discussed you will no doubt find that other moves are suggested to be stronger. All patterns, including this one, should be used with a pinch of salt and be something that your intuition can recognise quickly, particularly when time is against you.

The positions mentioned in this article are all that I am aware of; if anyone can find any alternative positions, I'd be interested in seeing them.

2008 British National Championship: September 27+28, Sheffield *by Geoff Hubbard*

This year the British National Championship Tournament was held in Sheffield, home of 'The Worst Dressed Women in the UK' (thank you, Google!). Rob Stanton had managed to arrange the Heeley Institute for us, a lovely community hall which, although not in the city centre, was not too difficult for everyone to get to.

If this were a fashion magazine I would explain how and why the women of Sheffield are considered the worst dressed and hand out awards. As it is you'll just have to do with an account of the Othello-related activities that took place there.

We began on Saturday afternoon, as is traditional, with the AGM. The most important points of that meeting are covered in my 'A Quote from the Chairman' article (page 3). Kali and Tani Turner, having not yet discovered the joys of meetings, particularly those which are 'annual' and 'general,' decided instead to spend those sunny hours in the neighbouring park. The meeting seemed to go smoothly enough and when it finished we began to get the tournament underway.

Adelaide Carpenter had again kindly volunteered to direct the tournament for us this year, and since everyone who had told her they were coming was there, and we had announced in advance that under these circumstances the tournament could begin early, we decided to start the tournament once Kali and Tani got back. They soon did, but somewhere in all the frolicking Kali had injured her ankle; it was swelling up impressively, but she had bravely managed to hobble back to the venue.

Thinking it wise to seek some professional advice, rather than relying on the 'oh that looks nasty' and/or 'she's a tough girl, she'll be fine' that the Othello players' medical skills could deliver, Ali Turner decided to take her daughter to the local Accident & Emergency, leaving us to begin the Tournament without them.

Round 1: With Kali and Ali away braving the Saturday afternoon football traffic searching for A&E, we had 12 players for round 1 which began about 2:30 PM. There were no upsets but Michael Handel, who had not told us he was coming, showed up 'late' but did arrive before the traditional 3 PM start time. Since we now had an odd number of players it was easy enough to give him the Bye for this round and include him in the tournament.

Round 2: Ali and Kali managed to return from A&E in time to play each other a quick game near the end of round two, thereby (re)joining the Tournament. (Sheffield: home of the speediest NHS service in the UK?)

The Terrible T by George Ortiz

I thought I'd share with you a simple endgame tactic I recently fell victim to. During a Dutch GP game, I lost to Jan de Graaf by falling victim in the endgame to a rather simple endgame tactic the French call 'la ruse du T,' the T trick. I actually knew about it before but just didn't see it coming in the game. I was White and needed to move at 54 with the board looking like this.

			○	○	○	○		
○		○	○	○	○	○		
○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	●
○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	●
○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	
○	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
○		○	○	○	○	○	○	

White to play at 54

I only had about a minute left on the clock so I didn't want to try counting anything. But I felt that simply playing 'parity' should get me home free so I played 54b8 thinking that I would go on to get both the last moves in the Northwest and Northeast regions.

BUT then Jan quickly responded with 55b1!! and I immediately knew it was GAME OVER as I had just fallen for the ol' T trick (so called from the T-shaped pattern in the empty Northwest region before the move).

	●		○	○	○	○		
○		●	○	○	○	○		
○	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	●
○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	
○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	
●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

White to play at 56

As you can see from the position above, there's nothing I can do to prevent Black from getting the last moves in both regions now. Just have a look at all of White's options and you'll realise how doomed the situation is. This is due to the fact that Black is inserted in a7 (otherwise I could just force play with c1) and the specific configuration of the T trick in the Northwest region.

So going back to the original board before my bad move 54, there was actually a move that won. It was 'simply' 54b2 to avoid the T trick, of

course. Now because I can play b8 at any time I can still keep parity and play the last move in the Northwest which is just enough to win 33-31.

Hopefully those of you who didn't know about this trick will now understand how you can use it to your advantage and more importantly how to avoid it :)

3 by Infinity Othello Part III

Here are the answers to the three questions on page 10.

(1) When the game starts 1C3 2B3, after each subsequent White move there are at least four white discs: the extreme disc she's just placed, the one next to it on Row B that has just been flipped, the disc next to that, which was also involved in the flip, and the other extreme disc.

It's not so easy for Black to arrange for White never to have more than four discs, but it can be done. Here's the pattern.

										5	8	3	6	17	20	15	18		
									○	●	2	4	7	10	13	16	19		
									●	○	1	11	14	9	12				

It's clear that Black can continue to play like this indefinitely.

(2) Here's one finite game:

											1	6	3	7					
											○	●							
											2	●	○	4	5				

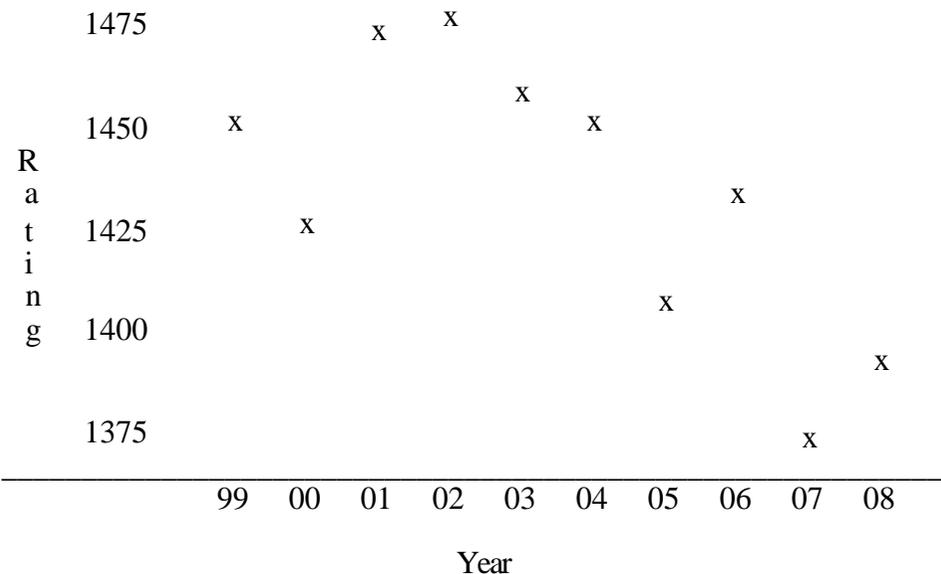
(3) 1B0 is clearly no good: after White's reply 2C0, it is she who gets to keep her opponent to no more than four discs.

The other option is 1A1. Now I claim White wins with 2C0 (P) 3A3. If Black replies 4C3, then White plays the game as in (2) and wins Infinity-4 (since empty squares go to the winner). Black's other option is 4B3, but then White can continue as follows:

											1		3	5	15		13		
											○	●	4	6	8	11	14		
											2	●	○	9	12	7	10		

This strategy uses the same repeating pattern as in (1) and keeps Black to a maximum of six discs throughout the infinite game. (I don't know whether White has anything 'better' than this?)

I'll leave you with one more puzzle. Is there any sequence of moves ending in a wipe-out?



(It's interesting that these are near 1400 which is the rating that everyone effectively started with. This, however, is probably a fluke. If all the poorer players decided to stop playing, these figures would be quite a bit higher.)

These figures produce a plot whose shape is similar to the one produced by using the select group -- a rise to a peak in 2002 and a general decline thereafter.

Now a politician (or some such), seeing the rise in the average rating from 2007 to 2008, would claim that they had fixed the deflation problem. But I am not so imprudent as to claim this yet! We need to wait another year or two before we can begin to assess properly what difference the changes might have made. The main point is that the changes have not had a drastic effect (which is the last thing we wanted), so we can leave things as they are for now.

3 by Infinity Othello Part II

When you start playing a game of 3 by Infinity Othello (see page 7), beginning with 1C3, you'll rapidly discover that this isn't exactly an exciting game to *play*, especially if you're unlucky enough to be White. Not that White gets wiped out: it's worse than that!

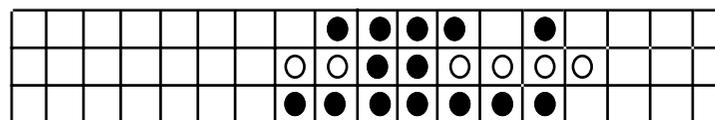
Here's a proof that, after 1C3, Black can't achieve a wipe-out. Moreover, no matter how the game proceeds, White never has more than one legal move, and the game goes on forever.

It's strongly recommended that you try playing the game at least once before reading on.

After 1C3, 2B3 is forced. Now, after that, here are five features of the position:

- (a) White's discs are all on row B,
- (b) the occupied portion of row B is a consecutive block of length at least three,
- (c) the East- and West-most discs on row B are white,
- (d) if the West-most white disc is at B_n, then Black occupies at most one of A_n and C_n, and no square to the West of file-n, and
- (e) if the East-most white disc is at B_n, then Black occupies at most one of A_n and C_n, and no square to the East of file-n.

Here's an example of a position with all of these features.



Suppose that, at a certain point of the game, the position satisfies (a)-(e). Now White doesn't have a legal move: (i) since all of White's discs are on row B, White can't have a legal move on row A or row C; (ii) since the occupied portion of row B is a consecutive block, the only possible moves on row B are at the ends; (iii) since the East- and West-most pieces on row B are white, these moves aren't legal for White.

So, possibly after White passes, it is Black to move. Black does have a legal move: if he has any discs on row B, then he can flip along row B, while if not, then condition (d) guarantees that there is a move away from his West-most disc, flipping either diagonally West or vertically. He can't flip both the East-most and the West-most white discs, since these are at least two apart,

so he can't wipe White out. After any Black move that flips neither the East-most nor the West-most White disc, conditions (a)-(e) are all still satisfied -- note that Black can't place a disc beyond either extreme White disc, or place two discs level with it, without flipping that extreme disc. So, Black keeps playing moves until eventually he flips one of the extreme White discs. As soon as he does so, White has just one legal move, flipping along row B. Once White has moved, conditions (a)-(e) are again established.

This shows that the game never ends, that White plays infinitely many moves, never having any choice, but never getting wiped out. If that isn't boardgame hell, I don't know what is.

So, how close can Black get to wiping White out? It's not hard to reduce White to one disc infinitely often, but if that happens then White gets the tiny joy of turning the whole of row B white on her next turn, so she has more than one-third of the discs at that point. I think it's 'better' for Black to aim to minimise the *maximum* number of White discs during the game. (More precisely, Black should surely be aiming to minimise the 'limsup' of the number of White discs: that's the minimum, over n , of the maximum number of White discs after n moves.)

Here are three more problems, answers to which appear on page 13.

- (1) What is the minimum value of k for which there is a game, starting 1C3, in which Black never gets more than k discs?
- (2) Can the game ever end after finitely many moves? (If so, then we know the first move has to be something other than 1C3.)
- (3) Can you prove that 1C3 is the 'best' opening move?

Rating Deflation -- Fixed or Not?

by David Haigh

My article last year claimed that our established ratings have been deflating over a number of years, as measured by averaging the end-of-year ratings of a select group of players. From 2004 to 2007 about 5 points per year were lost from this average. Consequently changes were made to the feedback and loss-limiting thresholds to inject more points into the rating pool and hopefully counter this trend. You might be wondering how we're doing.

In 2008 the revised rating system injected 186 points into the rating pool, 50 more than the previous system would have injected. OK, we've injected more points, as was the intention, so what has happened to the deflation?

Here we come to a difficulty. One person in my select group of people whose average rating was used to assess the trend has dropped off the active rating list. So I can't use this select group any more. It wasn't a very clever idea to use such a group for an inherently ongoing activity. Actually, it is not easy to think of a flawless way of selecting a sample of players to use for this average; all the ones I have thought of have some flaw. What I have decided to use now is the end-of-year ratings of every 'Briton' who played in that year and whose rating was established at the beginning of the year. By "Briton" I mean someone whose rating appears in the British rating list in the Newsletter. The reasons for using this criterion for choosing this sample are as follows:

- 1) The sample is as large as possible to lessen the effects of players entering and leaving the group.
- 2) Foreigners' ratings are excluded in order to avoid a spurious boost in the average which would occur when the World Championship is held in the UK, causing a large number of very good foreigners to play here.
- 3) I am only considering the inflation and deflation of established ratings, therefore I exclude ratings which were not established throughout the whole year.
- 4) Although they appear in the list in the newsletter I exclude those who have only played in the previous year because I don't want the rating movements for a year to be diluted by such unchanging ratings.

This sample gave these results: