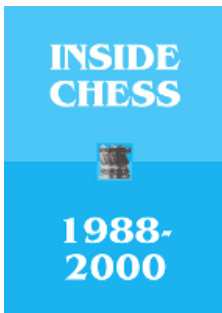




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The Life (and Chess) of Hyppolite du Bourblanc

by Rod Edwards

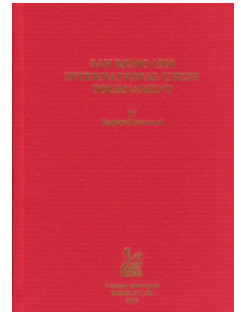
This year marks the 200th anniversary of the death of one of the best chess players of the time, but even his name is barely remembered today.

It is 2013 and Magnus Carlsen has just qualified to challenge Viswanathan Anand for the world chess championship. Vladimir Kramnik, the previous champion, equaled Carlsen's score in the candidates tournament, but lost on the tie-break rules. Ratings make it clear, however, that Carlsen has been playing better than either of his older rivals. A hundred years ago, in 1913, Emanuel Lasker was world champion, and José Capablanca was emerging as an obvious challenger, though not yet clearly stronger than Akiba Rubinstein or Carl Schlechter. Although there were no ratings then, there were many opportunities for chess competitions that were documented and broadcast widely, so the players' relative strengths were pretty clear. One hundred years before that, in 1813, the chess world was different. There were very few chess matches of any formality and very little information about more informal contests was ever written down or otherwise communicated. It was possible then for a great player to play only casually, and to disappear from the historical record almost completely. This seems to have been the case for Hyppolite du Bourblanc, reputed to be one of the strongest players of the first years of the 19th century, but whose accomplishments are recorded only in a few brief sentences in chess literature. Not one of his games has come down to us and almost no details of his life appear in the literature of chess, except the fact that he died in a shipwreck in 1813.

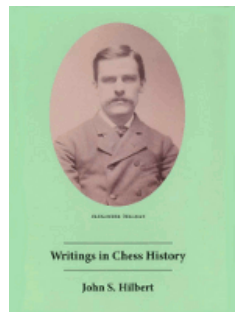
There is little hope of ever finding any of his chess games or accounts of his chess contests. In all likelihood, no such information was ever recorded. However, with a bit of detective work, some biographical information can be pieced together, and some context can be given for his short but quite interesting life, involving directly or indirectly many colourful personages of the time. Here, I put together the evidence from contemporary sources that helps us solve the mystery of his identity. I found it interesting both for the account of the life of Hyppolite du Bourblanc that emerges, and for the way multiple sources have to be compared to fit one piece of the puzzle to another. We begin, however, with what can be gleaned from relatively well-known chess literature.

The few contemporary, or almost contemporary, accounts we have of Hyppolite du Bourblanc as a chess player make it clear that he was extremely strong. The only really contemporary source in the literature of chess is Jacob Henry Sarratt's book, *A New Treatise on the Game of Chess*, published posthumously in 1821, two years after his death. Sarratt knew du Bourblanc well. Another source is an essay on blindfold chess by George Walker, which first appeared as a letter (dated 7 Jan. 1837) in *Le Palamède* (vol.1, p.434) but appeared in modified form as "Chess without the Chess Board" in *Fraser's Magazine* in March 1840 (p.306) and in Walker's book, *Chess and Chess Players* (1850, p.117). There is also a brief mention of du Bourblanc,

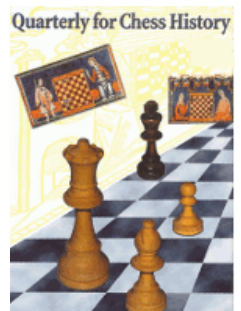
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presumably by Louis Charles Mahé de la Bourdonnais, in vol.2 of *Le Palamède* (1837, p.480). Walker and de la Bourdonnais lived not so much later and may therefore have heard stories about du Bourblanc from others who knew him.

Sarratt has the following to say about du Bourblanc in his book, *A New Treatise...* (vol.1, 1821, p.29):

"... the celebrated *Guillaume le Prêton* [*sic*, Le Breton, *i.e.*, Deschappelles], who has proved himself to be at least equal to any of his predecessors and who is considered to be the best player in France. His style of play is said to evince that remarkable genius and *brilliance* of attack which distinguished the lamented Hypolite du Bourblanc,* who was most unfortunately lost in the Indian Ocean, on his passage to the Island of *Mauritius*, in 1813."

The footnote reads as follows:

* "An uninterrupted friendship of fifteen years' duration between that Gentleman and the Author of this Work, will, it is hoped, be accepted as an apology for this tribute to 'departed worth.' The feelings of Monsieur du Bourblanc's numerous and highly respectable Friends are, he is persuaded, in unison with those of the Author."

Walker describes the manner in which du Bourblanc and Sarratt played blindfold chess, and assesses his strength:

"This reminds me of our English chess professor, Sarratt, and the celebrated young French player, Hypolite de Bourblanc, who were accustomed, in the beginning of the present century, to play chess almost daily together in this manner, while strolling in the pleasant meadows then skirting the north of London. Upon these occasions, if the positions became too entangled for satisfactory solution on the spot, the game was adjourned, until their return home afforded them the assistance of a chess-board. M. de Bourblanc could hardly find his equal here, except in the person of Mr. Sarratt, the first English player of his day; and would have probably struck a blow at the supremacy of Deschappelles himself, had fate spared his life a few more years. De Bourblanc was unfortunately drowned at sea, on a voyage to the *Mauritius*." (*Fraser's Magazine*, March 1840, p.306)

The earlier version in French states more strongly that any difficulties they might have had with playing blindfold were rare:

"Ceci me rappelle une anecdote qu'on a citée de notre grand joueur, M. Sarrat, qui mourut en 1821 [*sic*]. Dans ses courses à pied aux environs de Londres, avec un de ses amis, M. Hippolyte du Bourblanc, il jouait avec lui tout en se promenant, et par conséquent de mémoire seulement. Tous deux avaient une telle habitude du jeu, qu'ils commettaient rarement une erreur d'échiquier, quelque compliqué que fût le jeu. M. du Bourblanc était français et supérieur à tout autre joueur de l'Angleterre excepté Sarrat." (*Le Palamède*, vol.1, 1836, pp.433-434, but in a letter dated 7 January 1837.)

("This reminds me of an anecdote to which we've referred about our great player, Mr. Sarratt, who died in 1821 [*sic*, 1819]. On his walks in the environs of London, with one of his friends, Mr. Hippolyte du Bourblanc, he played with him while walking, and consequently by memory only. Both of them were so accustomed to the game, that they rarely committed an error, no matter how complicated the game. Mr. du Bourblanc was French and superior to all other English players, except Sarratt.")

De la Bourdonnais gave just a brief mention in a footnote to a game of Verdoni:

"Réfugié en Angleterre pendant la révolution française, il fut le maître de deux joueurs d'échecs remarquables, MM. Sarrat et Dubourblanc." (*Le Palamède*, vol.2, 1837, p.480)

("Exiled in England during the French Revolution, he [Verdoni] was the

master of two remarkable chess players, Messrs. Sarrat and Dubourblanc.")

Verdoni, it will be recalled, was one of the authors of the *Traité des Amateurs*, published in 1786, along with Bernard, Carlier and Léger and probably others. He was among the strongest remaining French players after Philidor died in 1795, though Philidor, even in his last years, had clearly been Verdoni's superior.

This is the extent of the information about Hyppolite du Bourblanc that has come down to us in the body of chess literature that is commonly known. A more obscure reference to du Bourblanc's blindfold skill appears even earlier in a letter to *The Tatler* (1830, p.346) by someone calling themselves Philosaccharia:

"I might have added moreover, that so to play [blindfold] requires a degree of skill not difficult of attainment, and that it was attained to a high degree by the unfortunate Mr Brand; by De Bourblanc; by Cochrane,---whom I have seen conduct three tables at the same time, chatting all the while up and down a public coffee-room, amidst the rattling of dice and the noise of a very Babel;---and by Mr Kean, who has many times performed the feat in public."

Another less well-known reference to du Bourblanc's chess skill is an article headed "Writers on Chess---Players at the Game---Chessmen" written by someone with initials 'R.B.' and dated March 1831, appearing in *The Year Book of Daily Recreation and Information...* (edited by William Hone, 1832), which includes the following discussion of English and French players, not particularly complimentary to Philidor:

"Whilst it may be, however, doubted whether the best players of late years have not been found in France, the question is one of comparative individual strength, that has never been tried; in number, the French certainly exceed us, and so, perhaps, of the generation that has passed away; for, without naming Philidor, in whose constitution the *faux brillant* appears to have been at least as evident as the profound, the names of the marquis de Grosminy, the chevalier de Feron, the chevalier du Son, Verdoni, and de Lagalle, amongst the players of the last century, and Du Bourblanc, Le Preton [*sic*, Le Breton, *i.e.*, Deschappelles] and La Bourdonnaye, of this, are a host, against which we have only to oppose Sarratt, and Lewis,--- beyond dispute the two ablest players that England has produced." (pp.284-285 or 568-569 in different editions)

The estimates of du Bourblanc's playing strength that we have from these and other early sources thus suggest that he was among the strongest players in the world in the first years of the 19th century. To summarize, he was considered

- to have a "remarkable genius and brilliancy of attack" according to Sarratt, who compared him to Deschappelles.
- to be a competent blindfold player, according to *The Tatler* of 14 December 1830 and Walker.
- to have been one of the three strongest French players of the early 19th century, along with Deschappelles and de la Bourdonnais, according to 'R.B.' in William Hone's *Yearbook*.
- to have been one of two remarkable students of Verdoni, along with Sarratt, according to de la Bourdonnais in *Le Palamède*.
- to "hardly have an equal in England" apart from Sarratt, and to have been likely to challenge Deschappelles if he had not died, according to Walker.
- to be one of "the great French blindfold triumvirate" along with Philidor and La Bourdonnais, according to Samuel S. Boden (*A Popular Introduction to the Study and Practice of Chess*, 1851, p.40).
- to be one of the strongest players after the death of Philidor, along with Sarratt, Lewis and Parkinson, according to Frederick Milnes Edge (*Exploits and Triumphs of Paul Morphy*, 1859, p.27).
- to be in the same class as a chess player with Verdoni, Bernard and Carlier, according to von der Lasa (in an essay included in *The Life of Philidor* by George Allen, 1863).

Almost no biographical details regarding du Bourblanc are preserved in any of these sources. Sarratt mentions du Bourblanc's death in 1813, as do Walker (1840, 1850) and von der Lasa (1863). And Sarratt mentions his fifteen-year friendship with du Bourblanc, from which we can deduce that they met around 1798.

It is necessary to dig deeper to put together a sketch of du Bourblanc's short but eventful life. By combining information from a number of sources, it is possible to determine who Hyppolite du Bourblanc's family was, which opens the door to much more information about his life, though most of the relevant sources do not give his first name. The key document is a letter dated 1 June 1807, written by a wealthy Scot named Craufurd Bruce to his friend, Lord Grenville, in which he describes his plan for sending his son, Michael Bruce, on a trip across the north of Europe as far as Saint Petersburg. In discussing Michael's upcoming trip in this letter, he says:

"I have procured a French Gentleman to accompany him as a Companion, the Chevalier Hippolyte du Bourblanc, who was very strongly recommended to me by the Duke of Montrose and by my relation Mr Craufurd of Piccadily, he is a steady, correct, well behaved Gentleman, he has resided here these Fifteen Years with his Father who was a Gentleman of Property in Brittany and a Man of the Robe and I believe a Judge in one of the Courts; his Wife is here with him and another Son, which I think an additional hold on the good conduct of Michael's Travelling Companion." (Ian Bruce, *The Nun of Lebanon*, 1951, p.47)

Michael Bruce was born 28 May 1787 (Bruce, p.44) and was thus just twenty years old when this letter was written. In later years he became the lover of Lady Hester Stanhope, the famous adventurer. We will return to his voyage with du Bourblanc later, but for the moment, it is the information about Hyppolite du Bourblanc's family that proves useful. Four important facts can be extracted from the above quote: (1) Hyppolite du Bourblanc had the title 'Chevalier'; (2) he had lived in England fifteen years by 1807; (3) his father had been a judge in a French court; (4) he had a brother, also in England.

In *Biographie Bretonne*, by P. Levot (vol.1, 1852, pp.168-169), is a biography of Saturnin-Marie-Hercule, comte du Bourblanc, who in 1762 became a councilor in the parliament of Brittany in Rennes, and in 1775 became attorney-general (avocat-général). He was known as a judge who worked for reform of government policies to prevent its abuses and to protect the liberties of citizens persecuted by authority. Nevertheless, after the French Revolution, he was forced to leave France with his family, fleeing to England in January 1792. He joined in two armed anti-revolutionary campaigns along with two of his sons ("deux de ses fils").

This description is entirely consistent with Craufurd Bruce's account of Hyppolite's father. In particular, Bruce mentions another son, and says in 1807 that he had been in Britain for fifteen years, *i.e.*, since 1792. Levot's biography also mentions that at Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc's death on 19 September 1819, he left a widow, a son, four daughters, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Note that only one son was left, while earlier two are mentioned. Hyppolite du Bourblanc died in 1813, so he could have been the second son. Note also that the phrase 'two of his sons' suggests that there could have been more than two sons. Levot explicitly identifies the surviving son as Saturnin-François-Alexandre, comte du Bourblanc, who was named gentleman of the king's chamber in 1829.

The hypothesis that Hyppolite was the son of Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc receives additional support from accounts of their involvement in schools that were established in London for the exiled French youth. There was a large refugee community of French nobility, including many from Brittany, in England from the early 1790s until the Restoration (when Louis XVIII became king of France) in 1814. According to Levot, around 1796, Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc became involved in teaching French law to the exiled youth, after they had finished their regular schooling. A contemporary account, however, by l'Abbé de Lubersac (*Journal Historique et Religieux de l'Émigration et Déportation du Clergé de France en Angleterre*, 1802), says that the law school was established in London in the middle of 1799 (de Lubersac, p.160), but also describes general schools for

children of all ages set up earlier by l'Abbé Carron. "Les Académies Françaises" held public oral examinations from time to time. At the exams held on 25-26 August 1801, among the examiners were "M. du Bourblanc, avocat-général au Parlement de Bretagne et ses deux fils" (de Lubersac, p.122), so his two sons helped with the examinations (see also the *Morning Post and Gazetteer* of 8 September 1801 and A. Antoine's *Histoire des Emigrés Français*, 1828). A few months earlier, on the 1st and 2nd of October 1800 were held the public oral examinations of the law school, run by M. du Bourblanc:

"L'exercice ouvrit le premier jour par un discours d'exposition que prononça en Latin le fils aîné de M. du Bourblanc: les objets d'examen étoient les deux premiers livres des instituts de Justinien et l'ordonnance criminelle de 1690. A la suite de l'explication du titre des *lettres de grâce et d'abolition*, M. le chevalier du Bourblanc, fils cadet, termina la séance par un discours François plein de sensibilité analogue au titre qu'on venoit d'exprimer, et à la position où se trouvoient les François..." (de Lubersac, p.162)

("The exercise opened the first day with an expository discourse given in Latin by the elder son of Mr. du Bourblanc: the subjects examined were the first two books of the Institutes of Justinian and the criminal ordinance of 1690. Following an explanation of the title of the *letters of justice (grace) and abolition* [French legal terms from the criminal ordinance dealing with reprieves], the chevalier du Bourblanc, the younger son, ended the session with a speech in French full of sensitivity analogous to the title he had just explained, and on the position in which the French people find themselves...")

Thus, the younger son was "le chevalier du Bourblanc," the same title attributed to Hyppolite by Craufurd Bruce. His actual speech is given by de Lubersac on pp.165-167 where it is stated explicitly that "M. le chevalier du Bourblanc" was a student in the law school. In another book, *Vie de l'Abbé Carron...* (vol.2, 1866, p.79), more details about the 1801 examinations of the Académies Françaises are given, and among five students who took the exam in philosophy is listed "Alexis-René-Félix du Bourblanc, de Rennes," who might therefore be a third son of Saturnin-Marie-Hercule.

This is supported by a genealogical website, [GeneaNet](#), which lists the children of Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc and Adélaïde-Marie-Louise le Cardinal de Kernier as Saturnin-François-Alexandre (born 19 August 1776, died 19 December 1849), Adélaïde-Marie-Caroline (born 1 February 1779), Amélie-Hélène-Alexandrine-Marie (born 21 June 1780, died 10 November 1858), Alexis-René-Félix (born 28 December 1785), Alexandrine-Joséphine-Caroline (baptised 27 August 1788), Antoinette-Catherine-Benjamin (born 25 November 1794), as well as another daughter, Hélène-Auguste-Olympe (born 31 May 1769), by an earlier marriage. Some of this information can also be found in the *Histoire de la Maison royale de France* (see for example, vol.9, part 2, 1879, pp.563, 865). Although Hyppolite is not listed here, it seems almost certain that this was his family, and that he was the 'chevalier' who was the younger brother of Saturnin-François-Alexandre. The dates of the other children, the fact that he was younger than Saturnin-François-Alexandre, and the fact that he was involved in military campaigns in 1793 as well as helping with the examinations of the young students in 1801 all suggest that Hyppolite was the second child, between Saturnin-François-Alexandre and Adélaïde-Marie-Caroline, and was thus born between about April 1777 and May 1778 (barring the unlikely event that he was a twin). The fact that he is missing in this family tree is presumably a consequence of his death in 1813, a year before the restoration in 1814, when the du Bourblanc family returned to France, and thus, his absence from any census information afterwards.

Interestingly, the third son, Alexis-René-Félix, also seems to have died young, since Levot says that the comte du Bourblanc was survived by only one son, and that was Saturnin-François-Alexandre. An interesting document, *États détaillés des liquidations faites par la Commission d'Indemnité, à L'époque du 31 décembre 1826...* is a record of reimbursements for those dispossessed by the revolutionaries. On p.12, we find that the du Bourblanc family was reimbursed 83,936.74 francs on 13 October 1826, divided among six beneficiaries of "Le comte de Bourblanc (Saturnin-Marie-Hercule),

émigré," including five children (Saturnin, Adélaïde, Amélie, Alexandrine and Antoinette), and one grand-daughter. There is no mention of Alexis or Hyppolite, both being dead by 1826.

If any doubt remains that Craufurd Bruce's "Chevalier Hippolyte du Bourblanc" was the son of the comte du Bourblanc despite his absence in the above lists of children, further confirmation comes from the list of subscribers to a novel written for the young French émigrés by Madame F. Herbster (*Le souterrain, ou les deux soeurs*, 3rd edition, 1809, p.viii), in which the name "M. le Chevalier du Bourblanc" appears, as well as "M. S. du Bourblanc" and "Mademoiselle A. du Bourblanc."

Having established a family context for Hyppolite du Bourblanc, back to an approximate birth year, we can now put together at least some main aspects of the story of his life. He, like most of his siblings, would have been born in Brittany, in or near Rennes. In the events following the revolution of 1789, life became difficult for the French nobility. Hyppolite's father, Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc, was attorney-general in the Parliament of Brittany in Rennes. He owned "several large estates", which were "seized and confiscated" by revolutionary tribunals (Maria Denoon Peddie, "L'Abbé Bourblanc and his Scotch Pupil," *The Bulwark or Reformation Journal*, vol.10, 1881, p.10), and he emigrated to England with his family, as we have seen, in January 1792, when Hyppolite would have been about fourteen years old. With the comte du Bourblanc also came his brother (Hyppolite's uncle), l'Abbé du Bourblanc, who lived with the family in England (Peddie, 1881, p.11).

Levot mentions two campaigns or expeditions in which le comte du Bourblanc and his two eldest sons participated after leaving France. In particular, the second of these took them to Jersey, where a gathering of French nobility formed part of the army of the comte de Moira, who were planning to reinforce "les Vendéens" (peasant insurgents from La Vendée, a region on the Atlantic coast of France, fighting against the revolution), but arrived too late. This took place at the end of 1793 (see, for example, *The Correspondence of William Augustus Miles*, vol. 1, 1890, p.90), when Hyppolite du Bourblanc would have been about sixteen years old. Another biography of Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc says that he was a refugee in Jersey at first, where his signature appears on official documents dated 1795 and 1796 (René Kerviler, *Répertoire général de bio-bibliographie bretonne*, vol.5, 1891, p.414). The presence of the family in Jersey is confirmed by the appearance in a list of signatories to a wedding there on 7 July 1796 of the names "du Bourblanc, avocat général," "Adélaïde du Bourblanc" and "Amélie du Bourblanc," as well as several other du Bourblancs (*Revue de Bretagne, de Vendée & d'Anjou*, 34th year, vol.3, 1890, pp.431-432).

In London, a large number of French émigrés settled, forming their own French community. The article cited above ("L'Abbé Bourblanc and his Scotch pupil") by Maria Denoon Peddie, editor of the *Evangelical Advocate and Protestant Witness*, reprinted in the *Bulwark or Reformation Journal* (vol.10, 1881, pp.10-14), describes life in the Bourblanc household during the time they lived in London. She says of "Monsieur Bourblanc" (*i.e.*, Saturnin-Marie-Hercule), that "his principal means of support in London was by receiving young ladies into his family, for the prosecution of the study of the French language." The article goes on to describe the time spent in his house by a young Scottish lady named Catherine Denoon. Although the article focuses on what is presented as her "perilous" exposure to Roman Catholicism, and particularly the influence of l'Abbé du Bourblanc, the family is portrayed in otherwise very positive terms:

"But though in perilous circumstances in regard to her religion, Catherine Denoon enjoyed all the comforts of a happy social home. She mingled much in the society of the young French noblesse, with whom the junior members of the Bourblanc family constantly associated; and, although in many respects their moral apprehensions totally differed from hers, their lively, elegant, unassuming manners greatly pleased her, while not a few amiable traits of general character induced in her mind no small measure of approval and admiration. She was particularly struck with the manner in which the young noblesse of France yielded to the circumstances of their adversity. Many were the different means

to which the noble French exiles had recourse to procure a sufficient subsistence in England; and the youth especially were ever most vigorous and indefatigable in devising methods to aid in the attempt, and in making a variety of articles to be disposed of. The staple manufacture, however, of the young French noblesse was the making of straw bonnets for general sale. The young gentlemen plaited the straw, and their sisters made up the bonnets. Every week they all met in assembly for the purpose of receiving payment for the bonnets and other articles which had been sold during the week, and of entering new work for further sale. 'La Réunion,' as such a season of general meeting was termed, was ever a most happy and joyous one, and few returned home dissatisfied with the produce of their cheerful labours." (pp.11-12)

There exists another account of this hat-making and selling, by Vicomte Joseph-Alexis Walsh, who in his youth had also been one of the French émigrés in London (*Souvenirs de Cinquante Ans*, 1845, pp.64-65). As we will see below, Walsh must also have been acquainted with Hyppolite du Bourblanc.

This provides a bit of insight into the life of the young Hyppolite du Bourblanc, who, after the upheaval of having to flee France with his family, grew up in London from his early teens in what appear to have been relatively happy circumstances.

Sarratt said his friendship with Hyppolite du Bourblanc lasted fifteen years, until the death of the latter in 1813. This places the beginning of that friendship in 1798. At this time, Verdoni was also living in London, and de la Bourdonnais tells us that du Bourblanc and Sarratt were his two "remarkable" students, so we can suppose that they were learning chess from Verdoni at about this time. In 1798, du Bourblanc was probably about age twenty or twenty-one. I have found no indication that du Bourblanc knew or met Philidor, who was also living in London from late 1792 (Allen, *The Life of Philidor*, 1863, pp.39-40) until his death in August 1795, but du Bourblanc was of course still a teenager then. Incidentally, Sarratt did meet Philidor, and in fact played him in a blindfold exhibition on 20 June 1795, when Philidor played simultaneously two games blindfold and one with sight of the board. Sarratt drew his game, apparently one of the games that Philidor played blindfold, though the report in the *Morning Post and Fashionable World* (22 June 1795) is not entirely clear on this point. Note that this report gives Philidor's other two opponents as Mr. Wilson and Mr. Gloster Wilson, and thus, Allen was mistaken to say (p.41) that Atwood was one of the players at this event.

Schools were set up in London for the French youth (the Académies of l'Abbé Carron, as well as the law school), and Hyppolite would have attended classes there. In October 1800 (at about age twenty-two or twenty-three), he was being examined as a student at the law school that his father directed, and he gave a rousing speech about the state of the French people, which the audience found moving, as a condemnation of the revolutionaries and a sincere call to support the French king (Lubersac, p.162). A few months later, in August 1801, he and his elder brother were helping with the public oral examinations for the Académies, where his younger brother, Alexis-René-Félix, at fifteen years old was one of the students taking the exams (*Vie de l'Abbé Carron*, p.80), as was "Mademoiselle du Bourblanc" (Lubersac, p.136), presumably one of Hyppolite's sisters (perhaps Amélie, age twenty-one, or Alexandrine, about age thirteen). In March 1800, the French Prince Charles, brother of the King, was visiting the school in London to give out prizes, and amongst the presentations, the young du Bourblanc and du Dresnai recited excerpts of patriotic French epic poetry (Lubersac, p.116). Whether this was Hyppolite or one of his brothers or sisters is not clear. His sisters also certainly studied in the school in London. Aside from the "Mademoiselle du Bourblanc" who was examined in August 1801, Alexandrine-Joséphine Du Bourblanc, of Rennes, appears in a list of students winning prizes on 15 December 1803, at about age fifteen (*Vie de l'Abbé Carron*, vol.2, p.87).

Verdoni, the chess teacher of Sarratt and du Bourblanc, died in 1804. Although it is not clear when, we hear from Vicomte Walsh (*Souvenirs de Cinquante Ans*, p.123) that "Hippolyte du Bourblanc" taught chess at half a guinea a lesson (Walsh was in London from about 1795 until 1802, see pp.58, 386). By comparison, Sarratt became a 'professor of chess' and taught for a

guinea a lesson (Hooper and Whyld, *Oxford Companion to Chess*, 2nd edition, 1992, p.354).

In 1807, Hyppolite accompanied Michael Bruce (1787-1861) on his journey across northern Europe. The route was no doubt chosen to avoid the turmoil caused by Napoleon's campaigns further south. The following account of their trip to Germany, Denmark and Sweden is from Ian Bruce's *The Nun of Lebannon*, based mainly on original letters. The turmoil of war, as it turned out, was hard to avoid.

By 15 June 1807, Bruce was furnished with letters of introduction and passports for himself, for his valet, James Purvis, and for Hyppolite du Bourblanc. On the 4th of July they were in Altona (Hamburg, Germany), where Bruce (and presumably du Bourblanc) had been introduced to the nobility. On the 16th of July, they were in Kiel and then spent six days at Plön, where they dined four times with Prince Christian of Denmark, and where the Princess persuaded Bruce to stay longer than he intended. He recounts in a letter to his father: "...she told me that it was impossible for me to go the next day, as she had planned an expedition to Travesmunde and that Monsr. Bourblanc and myself were included in the party." (Bruce, p.47)

By the 21st of July, they were in Copenhagen. Britain and Denmark had at this time become involved in a dispute over shipping access to Baltic ports and Denmark's dealings with Napoleon. Bruce wrote critically of the English government's position and supported the Danes. As Copenhagen prepared for the arrival of the English fleet, Bruce and du Bourblanc went to Elsinor [Helsingor] and then across to Helsingborg, Sweden. Letters Bruce wrote on the 1st and 8th of September locate them only somewhere on the Island of Zealand (where Copenhagen sits on its eastern coast). The English fleet bombarded Copenhagen from the 2nd to 5th of September, destroying part of the city. Bruce and du Bourblanc visited the city shortly afterwards, as Bruce writes in another letter:

"As I had a great curiosity to see with my own eyes the ravages which had been done by our own shells and canons, I formed the resolution of entering, either by fair or foul means. It required some ingenuity and some boldness to carry my project into execution. Necessity is the Mother of Invention, for notwithstanding the many obstacles and difficulties which at first presented themselves, I finally gained my object. I may assert I think without fear of contradiction that I was the first and only Englishman that entered Copenhagen, Monsr. Bourblanc was with me, but he being a Frenchman does not in the least serve to invalidate my first assertion. When we first entered, we were not aware of the danger of our situation, but we were afterwards informed by a person of our acquaintance, that if the Danes knew we were in Copenhagen, such was the state of their irritation, and so exasperated were they against the English, that they would not have hesitated to have us put to Death. We however made our circuit and likewise our retreat without meeting with any Molestation." (Bruce, pp.48-49)

It is interesting to read an account of the lead up to and execution of this bombardment from the English side in *The Diaries and Letters of Sir George Jackson*, K.C.H. (vol. 2, 1872).

Needless to say, the intended voyage had been seriously delayed. On 12 October Bruce wrote from Gothenburg (Göteborg), Sweden:

"Louis the eighteenth who still keeps the title of King of France, the Duc d'Angouleme and the Duc de Berri with all their attendants are here at present, waiting for a fair wind to convey them to England. I have been introduced to the King and likewise have dined with him. I offered him a map of Copenhagen which he most graciously accepted. He appears to be a very amiable man, and it is impossible to have behaved with greater condescension and civility, than he has towards us." (Bruce, p.49)

Du Bourblanc would almost certainly have been present at this dinner with the French King, and this is confirmed by Bruce's use of the third person plural above ("towards us").

From Gothenburg, they went to Stockholm, where Bruce met with Lord Hutchinson, an English diplomat. There seems to be no indication that they went any further. Their return journey to England was also difficult and they did not reach Yarmouth until 10 January 1808:

"...we were detained nearly three weeks at Gottenburgh before we went on board, and fourteen days in the river Gotha, after we had embarked. We were a week on our passage, and after having passed through all the dangers of the Sleeve [i.e. the English Channel]---we were in hopes of reaching England without meeting with any accident. Our hopes unfortunately were not realised; we struck upon the Hasborough Sands distant about 24 miles from Yarmouth."

This is a strange coincidence: we know that du Bourblanc eventually died in a shipwreck, but it would seem that he was on a ship that ran aground in 1808 as well.

We have a little further information about Hyppolite du Bourblanc just before his death. By 1813, he was pursuing a career in the military. In February 1813 (between the 13th and 16th), "lieutenant Hippolite du Bourblanc joined the 60th regiment of foot guards "from the half-pay of Du Dresney's late regiment" (*Royal Military Chronicle*, vol. 6, May 1813, p.66), and thus, had been in the English army for some time before that. On 18 February 1813, he became Captain of a Company in "Meuron's Regiment" (a famous regiment originally serving the Dutch East India Company, but by this time British), apparently taking over from Meuron himself, who retired (*Royal Military Panorama or Officer's Companion*, April, 1813, p.89; Guy de Meuron, *Le régiment Meuron*, 1982). His old position in the 60th foot was taken over by a Matthew Moore on 11 March 1813 (*Royal Military Chronicle*, vol.6, May 1813, p.166). Then du Bourblanc resigned this position, which on 1 July 1813 was taken over by a William J. Campbell (*Royal Military Panorama or Officer's Companion*, October, 1813, p.76). Meuron's regiment was sent in May 1813 to Canada, so it seems likely that du Bourblanc resigned some time before 1 July, though Guy de Meuron (*Le régiment Meuron*, 1982, p.306) gives this as the date of du Bourblanc's resignation.

Whether du Bourblanc's voyage to Mauritius in 1813 was for a military posting or not is open to conjecture. The English had just taken the island of Mauritius from the French in 1810. I have not been able to identify with certainty the shipwreck in which du Bourblanc perished: according to Sarratt it was bound for Mauritius and was wrecked in the Indian Ocean. A list of numbers of ships entering Port Louis, Mauritius, shows that 264 ships arrived in 1813, of which 263 were English, and none French, of course (Robert Montgomery Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire...*, 1839, p.514), so there was a great deal of shipping traffic to the island. A [website](#) written by the great-great-great-great granddaughter of John Coggle, mentions that her ancestor was in the 22nd Cheshire foot regiment, which landed in Mauritius on 18 October 1813. Thus, it seems plausible that du Bourblanc was on his way there on military duty, when his ship was lost. A ship was wrecked on arriving at Mauritius on 30 January 1814, according to a biography of Sir Robert Barclay (in R.G. Thorne's *The House of Commons*, vol. 1, 1986), who survived the wreck but lost his effects. This seems like a potential candidate for du Bourblanc's vessel, though its wreck did not quite occur in 1813.

Hyppolite du Bourblanc encountered a number of interesting and famous people in his life, as recounted above. One other possible acquaintance is the writer, Sarah Harriet Burney, who mingled with the French émigrés, as did her sister, Frances (Fanny) Burney, now the more famous author. In a letter to her friend Charlotte Barrett, written during a visit to Lymington, Hampshire, and dated 14 August 1812, Sarah says:

"M. de Bourblanc, whom probably Barrett knows, has been here for a couple of days, (I believe at M. de Chapelle's) but I missed seeing him, which I regret, for he is not only an old acquaintance, but an old favorite of mine" (*Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*, edited by Lorna J. Clark, 1997, p.164).

Before discussing the "M. de Bourblanc" in this letter, we may pause to wonder about "M. de Chapelle," who lived in a cottage in Lymington. Sarah had visited him during the birthday of his mother, Marie-Claude-Eleanor-

Alexandrine Guiton Breton des Chapelles (fl. 1797-1817), and knew his sister, Madame de Gomer, who was born Agathe Breton des Chapelles (fl. 1797-1823) and had married the comte de Gomer (Burney, pp.163-1644). It would be interesting to know if there was any relationship between these "Breton des Chapelles" and the well-known Alexandre Louis Honoré Lebreton Deschappelles, probably the best chess player in the world at that time. Incidentally, another prominent Breton family was the "de la Bourdonnaye" family, members of which were also among the émigré community in England. Of course, Louis Charles Mahé de la Bourdonnais was born in Mauritius, but presumably came from this noble family of Brittany.

To return to the "M. de Bourblanc" mentioned by Sarah Harriet Burney, Lorna Clark tentatively identifies him as Charles-Marie-Henri de Bourblanc, le marquis d'Apreville (born 1766), based on his entry in *Nobiliaire universel* (vol. 8, p.342), which says that he emigrated in 1791, though it does not say where he emigrated. However, given the prominent place played by Saturnin-Marie-Hercule du Bourblanc and his family in the French émigré community in England, as shown above, it seems more likely that one of them was the du Bourblanc with whom Sarah Harriet Burney was acquainted. The *Nobiliaire universel* (also the *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse*, vol. 14, 1784, pp.117-119) shows that Charles-Marie-Henri and Saturnin-Marie-Hercule were from different branches of the du Bourblanc family, and thus related but not extremely closely. In any case, there is at least a good possibility that Sarah Harriet Burney knew Hyppolite du Bourblanc.

Sarah's sister, Fanny, had married another émigré, General Alexandre d'Arblay, in 1793. Interestingly, Fanny's son, Alexander (1794-1837) later became passionate about chess (*Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, vol.7, 1846, pp. 280-282), and some of his games against de la Bourdonnais and McDonnell have come down to us. I know of no contact between Alexander d'Arblay and Hyppolite du Bourblanc but both were intimately involved with the French community in England, so it would not be surprising to find a connection.

These and further details of the life of Hyppolite du Bourblanc may never come to light. The information we have found, though, gives at least some shape and colour to our picture of the eventful life of a well-loved man with an undoubtedly phenomenal skill at chess.

Afterword (breaking news)

When I submitted this article to ChessCafe.com for publication, I also sent a copy to Dominique Thimognier, author of an excellent website, Héritage des Échecs Français, where he publishes the results of his historical research on French chess players. Overnight, he wrote back to say that he had followed up on my deductions about the identity and birth of Hyppolite du Bourblanc, and actually found a digitized copy of his baptismal registration in the Archives of Rennes. This gives his full name, date of baptism and place of birth, and confirms his parentage:

"hyppolite rené hercule fils de Messire saturnin marie hercule DuBourblanc avocat général au parlement de Bretagne et Dame adelaide marie louise Le Cardinal De Kernier son épouse, né près la place Du palais [Rennes] et baptisé le onzieme janvier 1778." (Source: Archives de Rennes – Côte GGStGe41 – Paroisse Saint-Germain, baptêmes, mariages 1er janvier 1777-31 décembre 1782)

("Hyppolite René Hercule, son of Saturnin Marie Hercule DuBourblanc, attorney-general at the parliament of Brittany and Dame Adelaide Marie Louise Le Cardinal de Kernier, his wife, born near the Place Du Palais and baptized on the eleventh of January 1778.")

The names of the godfather and godmother are also given, as well as other signatories. Thimognier informs me that children were normally baptized immediately after birth, either the same day or the day following. This gives us a fairly precise date of birth of 10 or 11 January 1778. Spelling tended to be quite variable in that era, but the baptismal registration gives "Hyppolite." Other spellings appear in various quotes in the article above. "Dubourblanc,"

"DuBourblanc" and "du Bourblanc" all appear on the registration of baptism document.

Postscript on Judy

Shortly after my article on "Judy, a Forgotten Genius of the 1850s" ([Part I](#), and [Part II](#)) appeared at [ChessCafe.com](#), Tim Harding contacted me with some additional information, and a minor correction. The most important thing I had missed was a game by correspondence that Judy, now using the sobriquet "Stella," played against Howard Staunton himself, appearing in the *Illustrated London News (ILN)* of January 26, 1856 (p.99) with annotations by Staunton:

A very slight skirmish, played by letter between the accomplished "Stella," of problem-composing celebrity, and Mr. Staunton.

(Irregular opening)
White ("Stella") Black (Mr. S.)

**1.f4 d5 2.e3 c5 3.c4 d4 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.a3 e5 6.Nf3 exf4 7.exf4 Bd6
8.Ng5 Bxf4 9.Qe2+ Ne5 10.Nf3 Bg4 11.0-0 Ne7 12.Be4**



[FEN "r2qk2r/pp2nppp/8/2p1n3/2PpBbb1/P4N2/1P1PQ1PP/RNB2RK1"]

12...f5 13.Qe1. Original and ingenious. **13...Bxf3.** Had he taken the Bishop with Pawn, Stella would have obtained a fine attacking position. (*Ex gr.:-* 13... fxe4 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.Qxe4, &c.) **14.Bxf3 Qd6.** Threatening. **15.Bh5+ g6 16.Qh4 Nd3 17.Bd1 0-0 18.a4.** To release the poor imprisoned Knight. **18...g5 19.Qh5 Rf6 20.Rxf4 Nxf4** and wins.

Judy, a.k.a. Stella, is mentioned in Harding's top-notch historical book, [Correspondence Chess in Britain and Ireland, 1824-1987](#) (2011, p.56), along with the above game. Harding also mentioned to me that Stella was appearing as a problem contributor to the *Illustrated London News* as late as 1867. I have looked further and found Problem No. 1209, by Stella, which appeared in the April 27, 1867 issue (p.427). The name "Stella" also still appears from time to time in the lists of people sending in correct solutions to problems as late as January 29, 1870 (p.131). The name "Judy" appears occasionally too, as late as March 18, 1871 (p.267) and again much later on October 11, 1884 (p.347) and October 18, 1884 (p.367), as well as "Punch and Judy" on February 10, 1872 (p.139), but can we be sure that these are the original Judy? A response to a correspondent in the 25 June 1870 column (p.667) does seem to refer to our Judy, retrospectively:

F.H., Mona. – The position by "Judy" certainly deserves republication.

In the February 11, 1871 column (p.139), Staunton responds to Stella, who still shows an appreciation for chess problems:

D.B., Stella, and Others. – Our next example of the Knight's Tour will exhibit still more remarkably the harmony of numbers you refer to.

Stella then appears in the list of correspondents submitting correct solutions to "Knight's Tour No. IV" in the September 2, 1871 issue (p.211). No other late references to Judy or Stella occur.

As for the minor correction, I had guessed that the editors of the chess column

of the *Home Circle* magazine were Kling and Horwitz, because they appear in lists of contributors, but in fact it was Henry Cook Mott who had charge of the column.

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