THE PROBLEMS OF ROBERT GRAY by Iain Sinclair

Lecture given to the BCPS at Paisley on 7th April 1995

On 28th December 1934, a lecture was being delivered to BCPS members at the St.Bride's Institute, London, on the subject of "The Search for Themes in the Two-mover". The author of that lecture was Robert Gray who, I am pleased to say, is with us here tonight. Due to the distance from Paisley to London, Mr Gray did not actually deliver the lecture himself; it was read on his behalf. One of the introductory remarks in Mr Gray's lecture was that "due to his geographical location he had never actually met another chess problemist". Well, he may have had to wait sixty years, but we are certainly remedying that situation tonight! I do actually believe that he has met one or two problemists in the intervening 60 year period but, nevertheless, it seems appropriate that this first gathering of BCPS members north of the border should be in Mr Gray's home town of Paisley.

You must forgive me if I lapse into the formal "Mr Gray" from time to time, instead of the informal "Bert Gray" which is how he is known to all his friends. My own association with Bert goes back to 1965 when he was Deputy Head Master and Head Maths. Teacher at Paisley Grammar School, which was where I received my secondary education from 1965-71. Bert ran the school chess club and introduced me to chess problems at that time, but he was of course "Mr Gray" for these 6 years, a form of address which even now I find hard to drop. Bert's association with Paisley goes back still further. He himself was educated at Paisley Grammar before going on to graduate at Glasgow University and then enter the teaching profession.

The problems are presented in ten groups (A-J), and although the majority of groups feature two-movers I have interspersed them with groups of other types in the hope that some part of the lecture will appeal to every taste. My first group of problems is entitled "Early two-movers" and covers some of Bert's earliest work in the period 1930 to 1935. He began to compose in 1931 at the age of 24, having become interested through solving problems in the *Glasgow Herald* (under the name of "Algol").

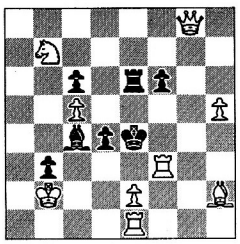
Robert Gray, 1970

A1 is Bert's first problem, described by D.M.MacIsaac, Chess Problem Editor of the *Glasgow Herald* as "As pretty a 2-mover as we have seen. The feature of the problem is the double-pin mate after 1...Kd5, but all the variations are pretty and the effects are secured with admirable economy". Observe the flight-giving key and the busy WQ which, as well as taking part in the double-pin mate, also gives mate on g4, e6, g6, and g2 after various Bl defences.

A2 is another of Bert's very early problems. It too appeared in the *Glasgow Herald*, and features the Star Flights theme. Barry Barnes featured this problem in his **Pick of the Best Chess Problems** under the banner "Beginner's Luck!". Observe the thematic key, yielding one of the star flights, and the way each of the 4 flights is met by a mate by the same bishop. Bert remembers showing this problem to Mr MacIsaac at the latter's stamp shop. Mr MacIsaac solved it very quickly and then offered to print it. Bert can still remember his own comment to this day after 65 years - "What! Is it worth printing?".

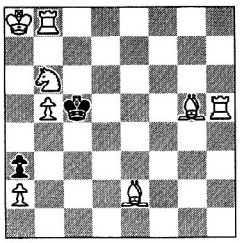
A3 is the first honoured work by Bert that I have been able to locate, but I caveat that it was honoured in a "tourney for composers not previously prize-winners in international tourneys". It appeared under the Scottish-sounding banner "Gang forward" and was also reprinted in the *Glasgow Herald* in April 1933. The judge's comment was "A fine problem dealing with the cross-check theme, with self-pin of the BQ. The cross-check by discovery capturing the BR is also very good". Note how the key permits one new check

A1 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



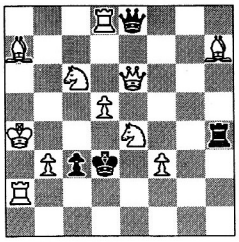
#2 1.Rd3 (-)

A2 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



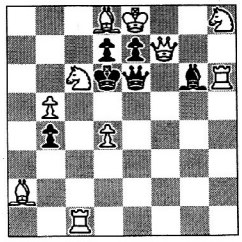
#2 1.Re8 (-)

A3 Robert Gray
4 Pr *Il Problema* Jan 1933



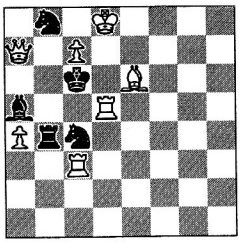
#2 1.Qh3 (2.Qf1)

A4 Robert Gray
2 HM *Il Problema* May 1933



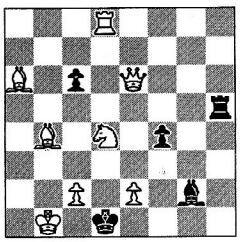
#2 1.Sxe7 (2.Bc7)

A5 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1933



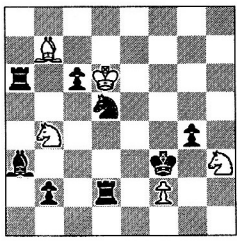
#2 1.Rcd3 (2.Rc5)

A6 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1935



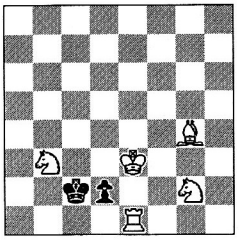
#2 1.Qh3 (2.Qd3)

B1 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



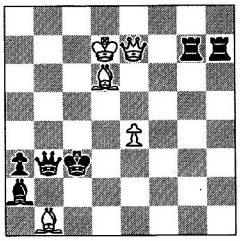
H#2

B2 Robert Gray 1933
1 Comm *Teplitz-Schönauer-Anz*



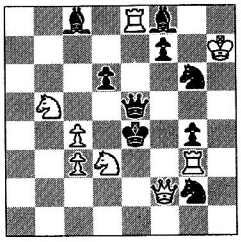
H#2

B3 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



H#2

C1 Robert Gray
Comm *BCM* 1938



#2 1.Qxf7 (2.Sf2)

and changes the reply to another.

A4 is, I believe, Bert's first #2 honoured in unrestricted competition. It features nice half-pin play with the two main lines being 1...Bc2 2.Qf4 (Q unpinned) and 1...Qc4 2.Sf5 (S unpinned). **A5** is a pleasing Meredith. There is good interference play on b6 with BS, B and R each in turn causing an interference on that square. Mr. MacIsaac summarised it : "Bl has 6 different ways of stopping the threat of which the most spectacular is 1...Sb6 2.cbS". The key thematically unpins the Sb6. **A6** is a lightweight to finish off this group; the two thematic lines are 1...Bxh3 2.Sf5 and 1...Rxh3 2.Sf3.

The next group of problems comprises H#2s. According to my **Guide to Fairy Chess** by Anthony Dickins, helpmates were invented in 1854 by Max Lange. However, none of my older problem books make reference to them and it seems to have been the 1930s (in this country at least) before H#s became fashionable. The three H#2s I have selected are typical of pioneering work in that decade.

B1 features a very pleasing sequence of checking and unpinning moves. The Bl moves giving check were often a feature of Bert's single line H#2s of that time. (1.c5+ Sc6 2.Sb6+ Sd4).

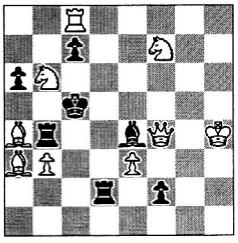
In **B2**, a surfeit of force is embarrassing W. The WR has to be captured and the WB obstructed before, surprisingly, W's two Ss deliver the mate. The problem has set play which, Bert readily admits, he discovered by accident rather than design. (Set 1...Re2 2.Kd1 Rxd2. Play 1.deB Kf3 2.Kd1 Se3). **B3,** concentrates on artistic effect and is perhaps indicative of the future trend in H#s. (1.Qg8 Bxa3 2.Bf7 Qb4)

My second group of #2s is entitled "pinned queen selection". I am not sure if Bert was aware of it, but he composed a large number of problems in which a pinned queen was the centre of attention. **C1** features Bl's pinned Q interfering with each of his Bs in the two main lines 1...Qe6 2.Qxg6 and 1...Qe7 2.Sxd6. **C2** shows 6 mates by the WQ in two of which it is pinned. **C3** shows 4 unpinning moves by the BQ met by 4 different mates by the unpinned WQ. I was surprised that the mates could be separated so economically. (Post lecture note: WQ is not really unpinned in the line 1...Qa6 2.Qd2). **C4** has two nice lines where the BB corrects with 1...Be4 (2.Qc4) and 1...Bg4 (2.Qe4). A second pinned Q mate occurs after 1...dxe5. **C5** has an unexpected key (preventing a 1...Rh5 defence) [*too difficult for the audience* - Ed.] and seems to parallel the previous problem with the BR this time correcting to give 1...Rd5/Re6 2.Qc4/Qd5. A second unpin mate occurs after 1...d5 2.Qd4.

Group D comprises three #3s. Bert would not consider himself a #3 specialist. He did, however, compose several of interest. **D1** is an early #3 published in 1934. There is a pleasing symmetry in the two variations 1...d6/d2 2.S5e4/S3e4. **D2** is an amusing problem which was also reprinted in the *Glasgow Herald.* It shows what Bert calls the "magnetic K" theme, with each of Bl's four R-move defences met by a corresponding move of the WK. (1...Rd3+/Re4+/Rf3+/Re2+ 2.Ka6/Kb7/Kc6/Kb5). **D3** is a difficult problem; even after knowing the key move, W's second after 1...Kxe4 is very hard to spot (2.Rg2!).

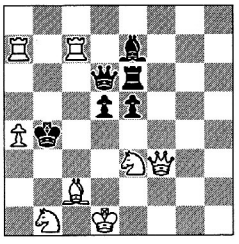
Moving on to **Group E**, I hope I have intrigued you with the title "The best 2-mover ever (easily)!". "Surely he is not going to claim one of Bert Gray's problems surpasses the work of all the greatest names in #2 composition", I sense you thinking. Well, you can relax. He is not! **E1** is the problem given that description and Bert recalls that Comins Mansfield was flattered when he heard Bert's opinion. Bert and I would like to thank John Beasley and Brian Edwards for tracking down this problem (Bert could only recall the general characteristics) and also this description of it by Godfrey Heathcote: "The finest half-pin 2-er I know. A splendid thematic key, giving a flight square and cross-check, leads to a wonderful series of five thematic mates after moves of the Se6 and another after 1...Rd5. The construction is a marvel of ingenuity and there is only one dual". Bert met Comins Mansfield twice, once when Mansfield was working in Glasgow and invited Bert to meet him at the Grosvenor Hotel, and a second time many years later by accident on a bowling green in Bournemouth. Comins Mansfield autographed a copy of **A Genius of the Two Mover** for Bert, but

C2 Robert Gray
1 Pr *The Chess Problem* 1943



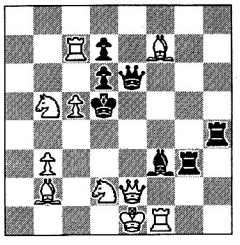
#2 1.Sd5 (2.Qd6)

C3 Robert Gray
The Chess Problem 1943



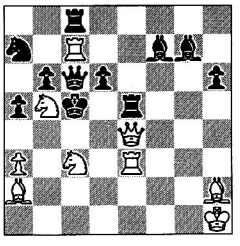
#2 1.Qxd5 (2.Rc4)

C4 Robert Gray
1 HM *The Chess Problem* 1944



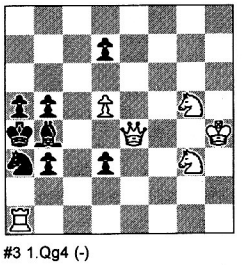
#2 1.Bf6 (2.Sc3)

C5 Robert Gray
The Chess Problem 1945



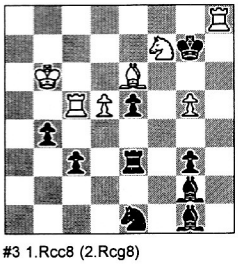
#2 1.Rh3 (2.Bg1)

D1 Robert Gray
Skak 1934



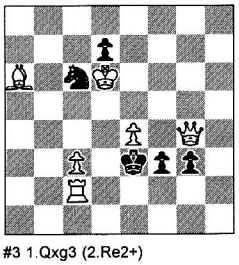
#3 1.Qg4 (-)

D2 Robert Gray
Sunday Mail 1943



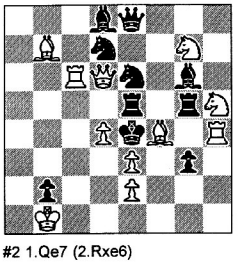
#3 1.Rcc8 (2.Rcg8)

D3 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1944



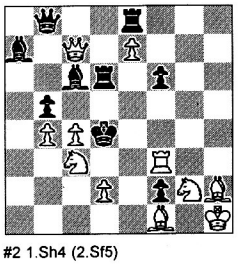
#3 1.Qxg3 (2.Re2+)

E1 Comins Mansfield
1 Pr *Ajedrez Argentino* 1926-7



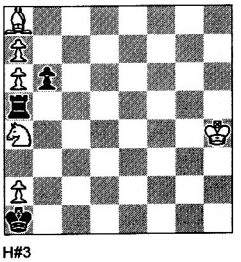
#2 1.Qe7 (2.Rxe6)

E2 Robert Gray
9 Pr *The Puzzler* 1934



#2 1.Sh4 (2.Sf5)

F1 Robert Gray
The Problemist FCS 1934



H#3

unfortunately this has gone astray over the years.

I have sought other links between Bert and Comins Mansfield, but the only one I can find is **E2** where Mansfield awarded Bert a prize. Mansfield told Bert the problem would have been placed higher had Bert not been doing so much work with R unpins at that time! The problem was described in *The Puzzler* as : "A fashionable 2-er. The WR, pinned by the key, is permitted to cut off each WB in turn by the unpinning defences 1...Rd5 and 1...Bd7. The ambushed WQ fully justifies her existence by taking part in two other mates".

Group F comprises longer helpmates. **F1** featured on the front page of *Fairy Chess Supplement* in October 1934. It solves by the precise sequence 1.Rg5 Bg2 2.Rxg2 a8Q 3.Ra2 Qh1. [Michael McDowell has since produced a neat version - B7/P7/K7/3r4/3S4/16/3k4, same solution]. **F2** is, I think, Bert's first 1st and features a beautiful sequence of line closing and clearance moves. It is quoted by John Rice in **Chess Problems - Introduction to an Art**, and I also noted it was used as one of the problems for solution in the World Chess Solving Championship in Israel in 1983. (1.Rg6 Rg5 2.Rb5 Rc5 3.Sd2 Rc3). The co-operation between BR and BB in **F3** is very satisfying. (1.Rg7+ Bd7 2.Rg4 Bxb5 3.Rd4+ Bd7). I think **F4** is a little gem. Precision play with miniature force on an open board, plus a switchback mate. (1.b5 Re7 2.Qe6+ Ke8 3.Qb3 Ra7). I wonder if **F5** is the first time a cyclic knight was shown? I would certainly be surprised if it had been achieved previously in miniature form. Bert regrets the WPf4, but I think he should be satisfied with showing the theme with just 7 men! (1.Rh7 Sxg7 2.Kd8 Se8 3.Bc8 Sc7 4.Rd7 Se6).

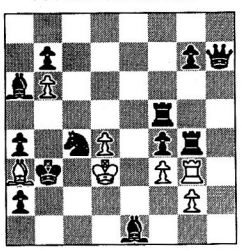
My penultimate group of #2s embraces three main thematic ideas : triple interferences, cross-checks and correction. **G1** has a BB interfering in three different ways with the same rook viz. 1...Bf6/Bg5/Bd6 2.Bxc7/Sxg4/Sc6. I am always interested in the way the mates are separated in this style of problem. **G2** has the complementary theme of BR interfering with a bishop in three different ways. The thematic lines are 1...Rf4/Re5/Rc5 2.Qg3/Qf4/Sc4. Moving on to checks and cross-checks, **G3** has four checking defences, all of which are enabled by the surprise key. **G4** has two pretty thematic lines after the checking defences enabled by the key viz. 1...Rcc3+ 2.Sc4 (since e4 is now guarded) and 1...Rfc3+ 2.Sc6 (since f6 is now guarded). **G5** is my favourite of the "checking" problems, with the three checks enabled by the key each met by a different discovered check by the WB viz. 1...e4+/Qc6+/Rf3+ 2.Bd4/Bc5/Be3. Great stuff!

The next two problems feature attractive 4-fold corrections by a BS. I love the key move of **G6** and it took me a good few seconds to work out why 1.Rh4? would not work as well (1...Sf4!). If 1...S~ 2.Be4. The four corrections are 1...Sf2/Sf4/Se5/Sc5 2.Rd4/Rg5/Sf6/Sc7. **G7** was described by the judge as "a very beautiful 4-fold correction". The key thematically unpins the BS which can then move at will to defeat the threat. 1...S~ is met by 2.Be6 and so Bl tries to correct with 1...Sd4/Sd6/Se7/Sg7 2.Sb4/Sc7/Rd8/Sxf6.

Group H, "Other types", comprises an endgame, a reflexmate and a fairy #2. Bert composed a few endgames from which I have selected **H1**. Stalemate avoidance is the name of the game! At move 7 we discover that Bl has one last trick left up his sleeve! (1.Rg2+ Kf5 2.Sg3+ Kf6 3.Se4+ Kf7 4.Sd6+ Kf8 5.Rf2+ Ke7 6.Rf7+ Kd8 7.Kc6 Rg7 8.Sb7+ and 9.Rxg7. If 5...Kg7 6.Sf5+ Kh7 7.Rh2+ Kg6 8.Se7). Bert experimented with reflexmates also, and I have chosen **H2** as an example. In the two thematic defensive lines the WS simultaneously unpins the BQ and obstructs a WR viz. 1...Qc7 2.Se7 Qe5# and 1...Qe7 2.Sc7 Qc5#. I have only found one example of a problem by Bert (**H3**) using Fairy pieces so I assume he tried grasshoppers but didn't like them! The work is reminiscent of some of Bert's orthodox #2s, but this time W chooses which of his own Gs to obstruct according to whether c4 or e5 is unguarded by Bl's thematic defences. The main lines are 1...Qxd3/Qxg4 2.Sb5/Se6. Note that the BQ unpins the S and self-pins in each case. (1.Sxg4 threat 2.Qc3).

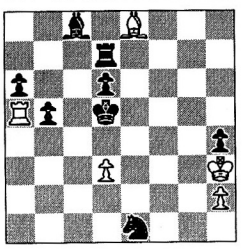
My final selection of #2s is mainly from Bert's later work on #2s in the 1940s. Bert thinks **I1** was composed in connection with a competition with Denmark. It features a flight-giving key and two nice half-pin mates on the same

F2 Robert Gray
1 Pr *Il Problema* 1933



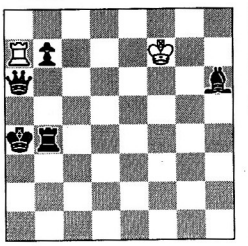
H#3

F3 Robert Gray
2 Pr= *The Chess Problem* 1946



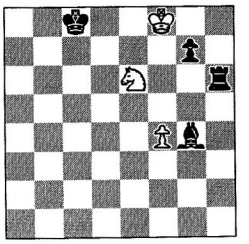
H#3

F4 Robert Gray (1946)
1 Comm *The Chess Problem*



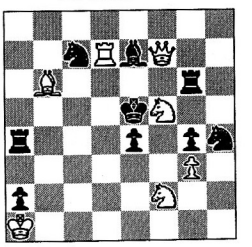
H#3

F5 Robert Gray
1 HM *Il Problema* 1933



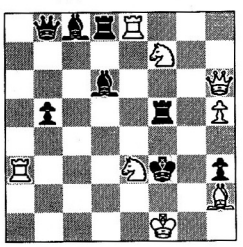
H#4

G1 Robert Gray
The Journal 1935



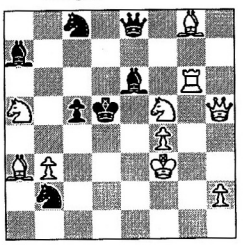
#2 1.Sd4 (2.Qf4)

G2 Robert Gray
The Journal 1944



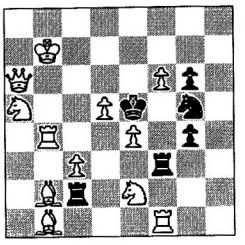
#2 1.Qg5 (2.Qg4)

G3 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



#2 1.Ke3 (2.Qf3)

G4 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1933

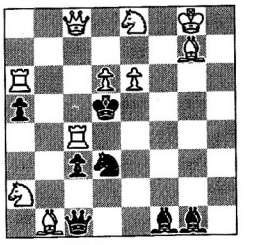


#2 1.Kc7 (2.Qd6)

G5 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1944

#2 1.Kc3 (2.Qa5)

G6 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1943



#2 1.Rg4 (2.Qc4)

diagonal in the lines 1...Be5/Se5 2.Qe3/Qg1. **I2** is the only mutate I have located in Bert's work. Three mates are changed by the key, including one in response to a checking defence viz. 1...Sxc5+ 2.dxc5 (Set 2.Qxc5). 1...Sb6 2.Rxc3 (Set 2.cxb6). 1...Qxf7 2.d5 (Set 2.Qxf7). **I3** shows 8 moves by a BR met by 8 different mates. **I4** is included in the later work selection only for the purposes of comparison with the next problem. I liked the key move, with its anticipatory interference with the BQ. The main lines are 1...Bd3/Bc2 2.Qg8/Sb2 but the WQ is also working well in the by-play 1...Ra2 2.Qxa2.

My final #2 (**I5**) is also the final one in Bert's scrapbook of cuttings indicating that by 1948 the transfer of his interest to bridge was almost complete. Bert believes at the time this featured a new type of key. Whereas in the previous problem the key was an anticipatory interference, in this problem the key is an anticipatory prevention of correction. Bl would like to correct with 1...Sc6 but W has anticipated this and obstructed the BR on h5 to enable 2.Ba6. The main defences are: 1...S~ /Sc6/Sd3 2.Bf3/Ba6/Rc2.

There is only one problem in **Group J (J1)**. This problem is so good it deserves a group to itself! This S#9 was described by no less a problemist than T.R.Dawson as "one of the most delightful problems I ever solved". Dawson reprinted the problem in the *BCM* and observed that the solution could be reduced to an *exact* geometrical formula. If W could play 1.Ra1 plus Qc6, he forces selfmate at once; the object of the solution is to gain the one tempo needed to bring this situation about. In general terms, as BQ advances so does WR; as BQ retreats the WQ advances. The following description of the solution is quoted from the *Glasgow Herald*. "Every time the BQ retreats, the WQ advances the same distance on the diagonal; otherwise the WR moves on the file to a square the same distance from the BK as the distance between the two Qs, until the Qs are on adjoining squares, when the R retreats to a1. Expressed in its simplest form as follows 1.Ra3 Qc6 2.Ra4 Qd5 3.Ra5 Qe4 4:Ra6 Qf3 5.Ra1 Qe4 6.Qf3 Qd5 7.Qe4 Qc6 8.Qd5 Qb7 9.Qc6 Qxc6. So long as W follows the formula, the solution is simple; but once departed from there is no solution in any number of moves, and the defence in its turn is simple, for it follows the same formula reversed. If at any time the defending formula cannot be followed it will be found that Bl can destroy the position at once, usually by QxQ. Another curious feature of this problem has been pointed out, namely, that it can be set on a square board extended indefinitely. On a board of 100x100 squares the solution would take 193 moves....".

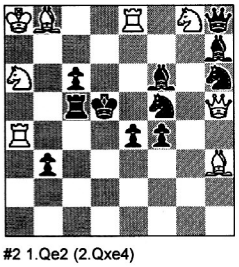
That concludes my presentation of Bert's chess problems. However, to understand Bert's talents fully, you must realise that : (a) He is also a bridge expert, and was President of the Scottish Bridge Union in the 1950s. From 1939, he wrote articles for the *American Bridge World* for 40 years. About 10 years ago, that magazine brought out a booklet entitled **The Best of Robert Gray**. However, it found it had so much good material that it had to issue **The Best of Robert Gray - Book 2** ! (b) He has a cabinet full of trophies for the game of bowls and won a "Champion of Champions" trophy as recently as 1983. (c) He is an accomplished pianist and to this day is involved in concerts regularly with various singers who greatly value his particular style of accompaniment. (d) He produced a number of excellent and entertaining "Brain Teasers" for the *Sunday Times* from 1975 to 1989. In the 1980s he also produced a variety of interesting word puzzles for the American magazines *Games* and *Four-Star Puzzler*.

Bert was born in June 1907 which makes him a grand old age of 87. Although he is rather deaf now, his brain is as sharp as ever.

Ladies and gentlemen - Robert Gray - a great problemist!

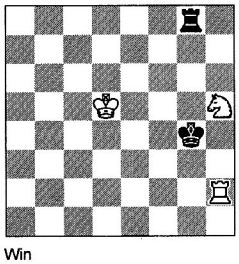
[Iain's lecture was created by sifting through 23 years of correspondence with Bert, and through the loan of Bert's own scrapbook. Occasionally he has had to make educated guesses as to source and date, but believes them to be reasonably accurate. Any corrections from readers would be welcome. The full lecture comprised 43 diagrams and is in the BCPS Library - Ed.]

G7 Robert Gray
2 HM *BCM* 1938



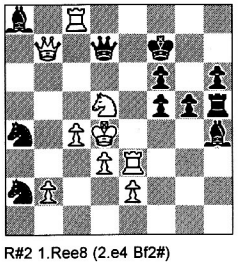
#2 1.Qe2 (2.Qxe4)

H1 Robert Gray
1 Pr *The Chess Problem* 1944



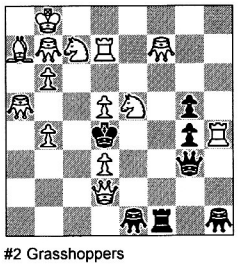
Win

H2 Robert Gray
Fairy Chess Review 1942



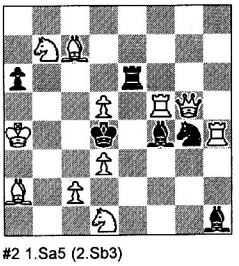
R#2 1.Ree8 (2.e4 Bf2#)

H3 Robert Gray
Fairy Chess Review 1934



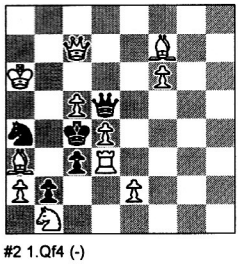
#2 Grasshoppers

I1 Robert Gray
Comm *BCM* 1941



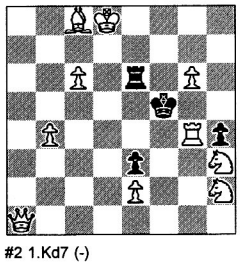
#2 1.Sa5 (2.Sb3)

I2 Robert Gray
1 Pr *Sunday Mail* 1943



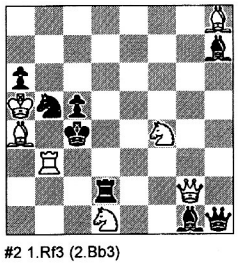
#2 1.Qf4 (-)

I3 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1946



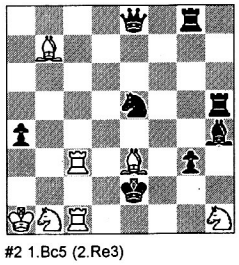
#2 1.Kd7 (-)

I4 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



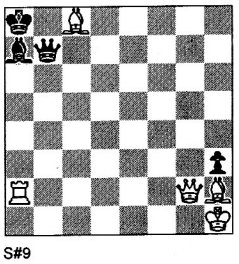
#2 1.Rf3 (2.Bb3)

I5 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1948



#2 1.Bc5 (2.Re3)

J1 Robert Gray
Glasgow Herald 1932



S#9