

CLUB TOGETHER JENNIFER COX SIGNS UP FOR...

Greater London Chess Club

The basement below St George's Church is filled with people and is silent but for the steady ticking of clocks and the occasional distracted rap of Hush Puppy on chair leg. The members of the Greater London Chess Club are in the zone.

Dating back to 1887, this is the oldest chess club in the country. 'John Gorton has been a member since 1956,' organiser Paul Efstathiou whispers proudly. 'He travels up from St Leonards-On-Sea. Two years ago, he beat an England International in a league match.'

The silence is a comfortable, companionable one: although many members have been playing for years, there's a steady stream of newcomers, and games are followed by a trip to the pub. Hunched over a board on one of the long tables, Daniel – lecturer in medical ethics and part-time magician – is playing Delroy. Daniel's hand drifts towards his knight, then he changes his mind and moves his rook, taking Delroy's bishop. Daniel hits the clock and notes the move on a pad as Delroy leans in to consider his options.

I admire their ability to focus so absolutely: with the attention span of a week-old kitten, I've always been a rubbish chess player. 'Code breakers and mathematicians tend to be the



grand masters,' whispers Paul. 'They use the analytical part of their brain to calculate the game ahead. I can manage three to four moves ahead but the best players calculate up to 20.'

I'm seriously nervous as I await my turn. 'In every game the biggest weakness is confidence,' Paul says in an effort to reassure me. 'Never underestimate your opponent.' I'm confident no matter how hard they tried, no one could underestimate this particular opponent.

*GLCC meets Tuesdays, 6.30pm until June 24, then again from September at St George's Church, Bloomsbury, 6 Little Russell Street WC1.
www.glcc.org.uk Tube: Holborn
E-mail Metro about your club at life.london@ukmetro.co.uk*