

## The Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2002 : Derby

The 2002 dinner was held at the Midland Hotel, Derby, on Saturday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>. The hotel, conveniently situated next to Derby railway station, exceeded everybody's expectations and proved to be an excellent venue. An informal gathering in the afternoon in the nearby Brunswick Inn attracted 25–30 people.

The dinner was attended by 88 people, including 48 setters; another two setters came later for a post-dinner drink. Setters present were: **Aragon, Arcturus, Arepo, Ark, Ascot, BeRo, Bogtrotter, Brym, Buff, Bufo, Bundle, Caper, Corylus, Derek, Dimitry, Doc, Elgin, Gioconda, Gos, Hamamelis, Hellebore, Henry, Jago, Kea, Lato, Leo, Macbu** (2 persons), **Machiavelli, Mespot, Monk, Mordred, Morix/2, Nibor, Obiter, Owzat, Pabulum, Phalarope, Phi, Pilcrow, Plutos, Politicaster, Radix, Samson, Tea Leaves, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev, Verbascum, and Viking.** Apologies had been received from: **Alberich, Auctor, Blank, Centigram, Dogop, Duck, Loda, Mass, Mr Lemon, Ozzie, Ram, Sabre, Smokey and Tiger.** [We have since learnt that **Ram** had passed away a few days previously.]

After a meal in which the food was excellent and the service impeccable the diners settled back to listen to the speeches. **Bufo**, as organiser, started things off by pointing out that the Listener statistics now go back 25 years. He called upon Richard England, the only solver who has appeared in all 25 years lists of top solvers, to say a few words. Richard reminisced about the days when the puzzle appeared in THE LISTENER and about dinners at Ye Olde Cock Tavern. He emphasised the tremendous debt that we owe two men: Mike Rich who started the statistics in 1976 and John Green who has now been checking the entries for the past 16 years or so. Richard's speech was very much appreciated by the audience.

**Bufo** then started the build-up to the awards for 2001. The race for the Solver Silver Salver had been an interesting one. After 24 puzzles there had still been 51 all-correct solvers but the 25<sup>th</sup> puzzle (*Times* by **Mr Lemon**) had reduced the total to 20. By the end of November there were still nine all-corrects but two puzzles in December accounted for six of these and a seventh solver was foiled by the very last puzzle of the year. One of the December victims was David McNeill whose record sequence came to an end after 268 puzzles. **Bufo** then asked Steve Rice, winner of the Salver for 2000, to announce the winner.

Steve mentioned some of the more difficult puzzles of 2001 to illustrate what a great achievement it was by the two solvers who had solved all the puzzles correctly. The winner had been decided by the usual countback system and the winning margin was extremely close. He announced the runner-up as Glen Mullineux and then presented the Salver to Piers and Elizabeth Ruff, a husband and wife team.

Piers and Elizabeth had been asked to choose the winner of the Ascot Gold Cup by themselves. Piers named several puzzles that had been among their favourites during the year before counting down to the winner. The runner-up was *Symphonie Bathetique* by **Elgin** and the winner was *Trick or Treat* by **Dimitry**. **Dimitry** stepped forward to receive the Gold Cup for an unprecedented third time.

That concluded the formalities and the rest of the evening was spent mingling and chatting and drinking until the final stragglers eventually retired to bed around 2.30.