

The Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner – 2013

This year's Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner (celebrating the puzzles for 2012) was held on Saturday 16th March at the Mercure Abbots Well Hotel, located on the edge of the city of Chester. It was just inside the boundary of the village of Christleton: and that charming Cheshire village is where we went for our pre-Dinner get-together, at the Ring o' Bells pub. Although the weather was fine when we set off for the 10-minute walk from the hotel, by the time a lot of our crowd returned, it was p***ing down; so some of the more enterprising ones clubbed together for a couple of taxis back.

The Dinner itself was attended by 110 people (it should have been 111, but sadly, Philip Sant – last year's Solver Silver Salver Winner – was taken ill on the very morning of the Dinner and couldn't be there after all); and this attendance was very near to being the best ever. Once again, JAGO requested everyone to fill in Jan's "update" form for their contact email addresses, which had been placed on the tables, so as to help him and Jan to ensure that as few invitations as possible (to the 2014 Dinner) would go astray in future – but once again, despite reminders, very few tables actually handed in a completed version of that form! (If you read this – whoever you are – please let us know now!)

The meal was really very good – one of the best in recent times – and afterwards, **Jago** proposed the customary toast to "absent friends". Apologies were given by the following 23 Setters: **Alberich, Ascot, Augeas, Bandmaster, Brym, Buff, Colleague, Hedge-sparrow, Ifor, Mash, Mordred, Mr Magoo, MynoT, Noggs, Nudd, Ozzie, Phi, Piccadilly, Pieman, Poat, Sabre, Wasp and Xanthippe**. There were also reports of the sad demise of two Listener Setters: **Ruslan** and **Gioconda**. Once again we nearly broke the record for the number of Setters attending. Present at this year's Dinner were: **Aldhelm, Arepo, Artix, BeRo, Brimstone, Bufo, Charybdis, Chalicea, Derek, Dilwitch, Doc** (aka **Twudge**), **Elap, Elint, Enigmatist, Ferret, Hamamelis, Henry, Homer, Hypnos, Ilver, Jago, Kea, Kruger, Lato, Leo, Macbu, Machiavelli, Mespot, Mr Lemon, Nibor, Nod, Oliver, Pabulum, Pilocrow, Ploy, Pointer, Politicaster, Quinapalus, Radix, Raich, Ron, Samuel, Shackleton, Shark, Spud, Stan, Stick Insect, Tea Leaves, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev and Verbascum** – 52 in all.

As always, the formal proceedings were wrapped up with the presentation of the Solver Silver Salver, the Ascot Gold Cup and the Bronze Casket. (We nearly had no SSS to give away: since – as I said earlier – last year's recipient, Philip Sant, was taken ill and could not return it to us. But John Reardon, otherwise known as **Nod**, came to the rescue. Victoria Sant had the presence of mind to telephone him and luckily she was able to deliver the SSS to him before he got on his train in London.) There were 15 All-Corrects for 2012, with Neil Talbott (**ELINT**) way ahead of the pack on 364! Roddy Forman (**Radix**) has made an impressive comeback – having won the SSS in 2003 - with a new run of 143 all-correct entries. Many others had fallen by the wayside since last year, and so Number 3 was now Adrian Mylward: however, Neil and Roddy did the "gentlemanly thing" and allowed Adrian to receive the SSS for the first time. In his acceptance speech, Adrian thanked all those who had fallen off their perches and allowed him to climb up the rankings far faster than he had dared to hope. After briefly summarising the deliberations of the A-C "electoral college", he then declared the winner of the Ascot Gold Cup to be **Bandmaster**. Sadly, Bandmaster was not present to receive the trophy in person; but John Henderson (**Enigmatist**) volunteered to accept it on his behalf and deliver it safely to him. John also proposed a Vote of Thanks to **Jago** and Jan for once again organising a hugely successful Dinner in a very good venue.

The Table Quiz (as always, set most entertainingly by Terry Wills – **Tea Leaves**) was won by Shirley Curran's table – which contained most of **Mango** and **Rasputin** – with a tie-breaking phrase that included a rather risqué word or two! Shirley now has to return the Bronze Casket in 2014, filled with goodies: the second time she has had to do that onerous task. After the main events had been concluded, many attendees haunted the bars and the final few (**Jago, Enigmatist, Radix** and **Artix** among them) retired just before 4.00am. We made no formal announcement about a possible location for the 2014 Dinner: but we can deny John Henderson's malicious rumours that it will be in Cornwall. The South-west is a strong possibility, so keep an eye out on various websites, but – please! – make sure we know how to get hold of you.

Jim Coulson – March 2013