

The Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner – 2014

This year's Limes Christener Toss-word Debtor's Sinner (dealing with the puzzles of 2013) was held on Saturday 22nd March at the Cheltenham Park Hotel, in the village of Charlton Kings. The pre-Dinner get-together was held at The Royal Hotel (though it was a pub, really, despite the name!) in the same village.

A record number of 140 setters and solvers attended the Dinner itself, where the main course (for meat-eaters at least) was Lump of Ram. We got a lot of very positive comments about the meal, both on the night and in later emails. Following the meal, the toast to absent friends included apologies from **Alberich, Augeas, Brym, Buff, Caper, Centigram, Colleague, Elap, Elgin, Hedge-sparrow, KevGar, Ottorino, Oyler, Ozzie, Poat, Politicaster, Pointer, Sabre** and **Wan**. Sadly, we have lost three Listener Setters in the past twelvemonth – **Mr Lemon, Syd Lexis** and **Radix** (as well as **Araucaria**, of course). Roddy Forman's sad demise will at least have a legacy (literally) in the form of the *Radix Auditorum Jug*, which will be awarded to the best new solver of each year. We were pleased that Roddy's nephew, Angus Porter, was present to bring the jug for us to show off. Setters attending this year's Dinner were (after a long gap, but still going strong at the age of 89!) **Adam, Aedites, Aldhelm, Aragon, Arepo, Artix, Bandmaster, Ben Trovato, BeRo, Brimstone, Bufo, Bundle, Charybdis, Chalicea, Cubic, Derek, Dilwitch, Elint, Enigmatist, Ferret, Foxglove, Garth, Gos, Hamamelis, Hedgehog, Henry, Homer, Hypnos, Ifor, Ilver, Jago, Kea, Kruger, Lato, Leo, Macbu, Merlin, Mespot, Morph, Mr Magoo, MynoT, Nibor, Nod, Oliver, Pabulum, Phi** (all the way from NZ!) **Pilcrow, Ploy, Quinapalus, Raich, Salamanca** (after 25 years!), **Samuel, Shackleton, Shark, Simian, Spud, Stick Insect, Tea Leaves, Theod, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev, Verbascum, Wasp** and **Xanthippe** (65 in all), which I believe to be a record! Also worthy of mention is the fact that Richard Browne (the former Times Crossword Editor) was present, as was Richard Rogan (**Aragon**) who has now taken over that position.

Before the prize-giving, I thanked Jan – on behalf of everyone – for her help in organising the Dinner and then, because the next day was her birthday, I presented her with a bouquet. On to the formalities. This year, the Bronze Casket was won by Table 10 and Dick and Marie Stamp have taken formal possession of it, to bring it back replenished next year. (Terry Wills announced his retirement, after nine years of setting the Table Quiz, and asked for volunteers to take it over. Happily, we had plenty of offers, so next year's Bronze Casket Quiz will be set by the combination of **Elint** and **Ferret**; and the year after that, very probably by **Enigmatist** and Dave Tilley.) We then went on to present the Solver Silver Salver, and this time there were twelve All-Corrects for 2013 (sadly, without Roddy Forman, who was previously doing very well, and would have been third in succession). Also missing from the list was Neil Talbott, who – by his own admission – committed a howler and fell at almost the last hurdle. Last year's SSS winner, Adrian Mylward, was thus out in front in his own right, but he of course did the honourable thing and passed it on to the next non-winner, who was Simon Melen. (Adrian's unbroken run is currently 191, whilst Simon's is a still-impressive 162, with the next nearest on 97. Sadly, Neil Talbott's marathon run stalled at an amazing 409, only three short of Simon Long's record – so there's a long way to go for *that* particular record!).

Anyway, suffice it to say that Simon regaled us with a run-down of the five best puzzles, as voted for by the all-correct solvers. The overall winner was *Elm* by **Quinapalus** (with *two puzzles in the top 5!*), who therefore received the Ascot Gold Cup from Simon Melen.

After the formalities had finished (and sadly, without any of the usual interruptions from Mr Lemon, about long-winded speeches), I then hinted that the 2015 Dinner would be in North Yorkshire. It happens that we are nearly there with regards to a venue, but it is just a little too early to confirm, as of today's date.

As usual, the Function Room Bar looked after the liquid needs of diners until well after 12.30am and then a good many of those (more than 40, by my reckoning) stayed in the Residents' Bar until gone 3.00am, with the final handful – including Yours Truly, with **Salamanca** and **Simian** – going to bed at around a quarter to six (another record?).

Finally, please keep an eye on various Crossword Websites, and/or your email inboxes, for news of the 2015 Dinner and please, please, if you change your email – or even if you're not sure that we have your current and correct one – keep in touch (jim@woodexperts.com), and thus let us know how to keep in touch with *you!*

Jim Coulson – 25th March 2014