

The Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner – 2015

The 2015 Dinner, taking account of the Listener puzzles of 2014, took place on Saturday 28th February at the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, North Yorkshire – a little earlier than sometimes; but constrained by the hotel's other bookings and the looming presence of Mothering Sunday, in a couple of weeks, and the concomitant hike in hotel rates, as punters take ma out for a treat ...

The Dinner itself was attended by 114 people (from 120 who originally booked): last minute drop-outs were mainly due to illness; but in 2 cases, due to double-booking with another event which had to take precedence. (Why? I hear you ask: what could be more important than The Listener Dinner?) And sadly, since returning from the Dinner, I have learnt that Trevor Crowther passed away on the Friday: hence his non-attendance (we'll miss you, Trevor).

The meal was voted excellent and the service was, too. Jan and **Jago** arranged for 2 barrels of Rooster's beer (brewed 3 miles away in Knaresborough) to be available in the Dining Room bar. After the meal, **Jago** proposed the customary toast to 'absent friends': which included **Brimstone, Colleague, Elgin, Garth, Hedgehog, Nudd, Phi, Poat, Sabre, Tut, Wan** and **Wasp**. He also reported the sad demise of three Listener Setters: **Ragtag, Syd Lexis** and – most recently – **BeRo**.

Setters attending the 2015 Dinner were: **Aldhelm, Aramis, Artix, Ben Trovato, Bufo, Chalicea, Charybdis, Cubic, Derek, Dilwitch, 'Eck, Elap, Enigmatist, eXternal, Ferret, Hamamelis, Henry, Homer, Hypnos, Ifor, Jago, Kea, Kruger, Lato, Macbu, Mespot, Morph, Nibor, Nod, Oliver, Oyler, Pabulum, Phobis, Pilcrow, Ploy, Quinapalus, Raich, Rasputin** (in parts), **Salamanca, Samson, Samuel, Shark, Simian, Spud, Stan, Stick Insect, Tea Leaves, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev, Verbascum** and **Xanthippe**; 53 in all, which may be a record!

Before the main awards were presented, **Jago** gave out two bouquets: one to **Hamamelis**, whose birthday was on this very day; and the other to Jan, for her sterling efforts in (mostly) arranging an excellent venue and in coping with the inevitable last-minute changes to the Table Plan – made all the more difficult this time by **Jago's** absence on business in the Far East until the day before the Dinner.

Then the awards 'ceremony' began, with the presentation of the Solver Silver Salver – won this year by David Webb who gave an entertaining speech about the process of selection for the Ascot Gold Cup. He said that John Green had produced a complicated Chart, organising the scores from each of the 16 All-Corrects and that it looked like some sort of Pollock (I think he said "Pollock"!). The voting showed very little consensus, with 28 puzzles receiving votes and nine different puzzles selected as individuals' favourites. The resultant top puzzles were:

- 5= *Spiral of Salami and Walnuts* by **Wan** and *Renewable Energy* by **'Eck**
- 4 *Going Out in Style* by **Homer**
- 3 *Tetris* by **Aramis**
- 2 *Feature Film* by **Ferret**

But the Cup was awarded – by a margin of only 1 point – to *Elementary Deduction* by **Rood**. Since John Hood (**Nudd**) was not present, his collaborator Darren Roberts (**Shark**) accepted the award on their behalf with a mixture of delight and shock.

Before the Bronze Casket was given, we had the presentation of the *brand new* 'Radix Auditorum' Claret Jug, given to the best new Listener Solver. This was awarded to Steve Bartlett who achieved 28 successful entries. So finally, the Bronze Casket was awarded to Table 9, which gave the best answer to the tie-breaker in the Table Quiz, which was set very ably by Mike Draper (**Ferret**).

At the end of the presentations, John Henderson proposed a Vote of Thanks to **Jago** and Jan (mostly) for once again organising a hugely successful Dinner in a very good venue.

Next year's Dinner will be in the South East, possibly Windsor/Maidenhead. Keep an eye out on various websites and look for that all-important email. And please make sure we know how to get hold of you, if your details change: and email *us* if you haven't heard from us by October this year!

Jim Coulson – 1st March 2015