

The Listener Crossword No. 2500 Celebration Dinner 1979 : Birmingham

The Albany Hotel, Birmingham provided the setting for the Dinner held in celebration of Crossword No. 2500, a landmark in the history of THE LISTENER nearly coincidental with its Golden Jubilee. For this occasion not only the setters but solvers also were invited, and Birmingham was selected as central to the country as a whole; it is gratifying to record, therefore, that among those present were solvers from Kent and Cornwall in the South to Scotland in the North, from Suffolk in the East to Clwyd in the West (and there was even a setter from Ireland).

It is not practical to give a full guest list, so I hope none will be offended if they do not appear among the following short lists:-

Setters: **Aeschylus, Apex, Bart, Brym, Crank, Cuth, Duck, Eel, Generalissimo, Gong (aka Azed), Hal, Jim, Jude, Klick, Machiavelli, Mass, Nibor, Notlaw, pH7, Phiz, Plutos, Sabre, Salamanca, Simian, Twudge, Virgilius, Zander**

From THE LISTENER: **D A N Jones**
Miss M E Gibson

Inter alios: **James Atkins**, former holder of Cutty Sark/Times National Crossword Championship
Roy Dean, current holder of same, and holder of Fastest Times Solution, as recorded in Guinness Book of Records
Eric Burt, responsible for all design work for the crossword
Jim Evans, 'The Vet', who examines all potential crosswords, (and revises, edits or rejects as necessary).
Brym – Editor of **Crossword Magazine**
Jude – Crossword Editor for *Games & Puzzles*

The Dinner provided by the hotel (with menus printed in French, no less – none of the scruffy handwritten efforts as at the London Dinners) was excellent, starting with grapefruit rendered bright green by the infusion of crème de menthe, through onion soup, loin of pork, crème caramel and so to coffee and liqueurs: all at a cost so reasonable that the Chairman was able to greet each guest at the door and buy the first round of drinks, thus ensuring the balancing of the books by the end of the day.

Satisfactorily replete, having toasted the Queen, and with cigars drawing properly, the assembled Company delighted in the toast to THE LISTENER as presented by James Atkins. In resonant tones, as befits a *basso profundo* (claiming only to be a teacher of singing now), and with very little help from the microphone, James presented us with a history of The Listener Crossword culled from a personal recollection going back very nearly to No. 1, and from deep research upon many visits to The British Library, somewhere in the heart of North London. He reminded us of the early days when it was presumed that all readers of THE LISTENER had an intimate working knowledge of Latin and Greek; when the crosswords were so difficult that THE LISTENER could afford to give prizes to all correct solvers; when the early gods like **Afrit** and **Torquemada** bestrode the scene. With wit and panache he took us through 50 years of crosswords and then all were pleased to stand with him and drink to The Listener Crossword in the words of No. 2500: *Floreat in Aeternum*.

With the post of Editor not filled at the time of our Dinner, Miss Mary Gibson, the Crossword Editor, rose to respond to the toast. She gave thanks to all those involved with the Crossword, and with the Dinner, and insisting that this was her only duty in the speech-making line, denied herself the opportunity to speak at length with a view 'from the inside'. One day somebody – David Jones, perhaps – will tell us what they really think about the Crossword down in Marylebone High Street.

The Chairman now rose to propose a toast to all solvers, both present and absent, a pleasure which he had unashamedly appropriated for himself. Using the knowledge gained from checking solutions for some years, he spoke of the many types of solver as they appear through the simple act of submitting entries, neat and untidy, coloured and plain, accurate and careless, quick and slow (some confessed to having completed No. 2500 by the time of the Dinner – shame!); he presented to the assembled throng the famous among them, and in compliant company, with much biblical reference (all of which he subsequently admitted could be found in ODO) engaged generally in pandering to the air of self-congratulation; he gave thanks to all who had written to tell of the early days of THE LISTENER, with a special mention for Ivan Cresswell: “It all started in April 1930 when, as a schoolboy, I was the only solver to send in a correct solution of ‘Our Crossword No. 1’” (Ivan Cresswell has in fact a copy of every crossword from No. 1 to date); and finally all rose with him for the toast to ‘The Solvers’.

In reply John Sharples stood up on behalf of the solvers and after giving suitable thanks then exceeded his brief by going on to propose a toast to the setters – not as advertised on the menu. With that done all parties had been honoured and the formal entertainment was concluded, though not the informal – for a further report see David Jones in THE LISTENER of the week following the event.

Roll on No. 5000!