

The Times Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner — 2023

The 2023 Dinner was held at the Mercure Grand Hotel, Bristol, on 4 March. It marked 50 years since the first of the annual Listener Setters' Dinners, which was held in 1973 at Ye Olde Cock Tavern in Fleet Street, London. Consequently, it had a 'gold' theme, with many guests wearing something gold, including specially designed ties. There was also a souvenir Golden Anniversary brochure, including copies of the menu from 1973, signed by all who attended.

134 people confirmed their attendance (though a few were unfortunately unable to be there on the night). Setters present included **Sabre** and **Third Man**, both of whom attended the first Dinner in 1973; also Alchemist, Aldhelm, Apt, Aramis, Artix, Awinger, (part of) Banjaluka, Brock, Cagey, Chalicea, Check, Craft, Cubic, Derek, Deuce, Donarino (The Don), 'Eck, Elap, Elgin, Encota, Enigmatist, eXternal, Gnomish, Hellebore (Danda), Henry, Homer, Ifor, Jago, Karla, Kea, Lath, Leo, Lionheart, Mohawk, Nod, Ottorino, Oz, Pilcrow, Ploy, Quinapalus, Rebel, Remus, Shackleton, Shark, Shenanigans, Simian, Skylark, Somniloquist, Spud, Stick Insect, Tea Leaves, Theod, Tiburon, Trev, Twin, Vagans, Verbascum, Xanthippe.

Jane Teather and John Henderson were organisers. At the start, Jane welcomed the guests then read out apologies for absence from setters. Mike Hutchinson delivered a tribute to **Alberich** (Neil Shepherd), who died in 2022. Jane proposed a toast to "Absent Friends and Future Generations", then handed over to **Sabre**, who gave a very entertaining address before proposing a toast to "The Dinner". Finally, **Vagans** (Bishop David Thomson) said grace before the meal started.

In his absence, **Oyler** sent a mathematical puzzle, Triples by The CQ Elves (Arden, Nod, Oyler and Zag), with a prize of £25 that was won by Gill Cocks.

Apologies for absence

Augeas, Aver, Bandmaster, Ben Trovato, Brimstone, Bufo, Charybdis, Crash, Elfman, Essira, Ferret, Foxglove, Goujeers, Hawk, Hedgehog, Hedge-sparrow, JFD, Llig, Little Hare, Lysander, Mira, Mr E, Nudd, Oyler, Ozzie, Pabulum, Phi, Phobis, Poat, Pointer, Raich, Rok, Salamanca, Smudge, The Ace of Hearts, Tringa.

Those who could not attend the Dinner in person were able to observe remotely via an online video feed managed by solver Dmitry Adamskiy. About 20 did so, including participants from Tasmania, Australia, New Zealand, Oregon and California, as well as the UK.

The Quiz

The quiz was set by John Henderson (Enigmatist) and formatted by Jane Teather. Clues were in the form of homophones, giving 'gold'-themed answers. Entering these into the grid revealed THE RIVER SEVERN, for which solvers were required to write a cryptic clue. The winning clue, as judged by John, was Table 8's "This never ever runs off course" [anagram of "this never ever" + R, and a literal description].

The Prizegiving

Shane Shabankareh (**Tiburon**) announced the winners of the Radix Auditorum claret jug — Ian Hickman, who submitted 37 correct out of 41 entries in his first year. He couldn't be there to collect the jug in person, but sent a poem, which was read out by John; the organisers promised to arrange a lunch in Yorkshire to hand over the jug.

Currently top of the consecutive all-correct rankings is Peter Blayney, on a run of 314 puzzles. The **Solver Silver Salver** passed to Paul Taylor (**Apt**) and Katie Steckles, who gave a round-up of the top puzzles of 2022, based on recommendations from the year's all-correct solvers. The highest-scoring puzzles were:

4742: Short Seats by Yorick (46 points)

4744: A Wrap-up by Kea (50 points)

4723: Faux Pas by Tringa (55 points)

4694: Follow the Directions Again by Artix (63 points)

4715: Singles Only by Twin (176 points)

The **Ascot Gold Cup** was therefore accepted by Twin, a Bristol local.

The Bronze Casket, presented to Table 8 for the winning clue, was filled with gold-wrapped sweets, consistent with the evening's theme. After its presentation, 'formal' proceedings ended with an indication that two or three areas are under consideration for the 2024 Dinner venue, and guests adjourned to the Bar.