

The Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner 29th February 1992 : London

The hiatus in the appearance of the Listener Crossword caused the dinner to be postponed from its usual autumn slot to February: February 29th, to be precise, and it will be a long time before it runs on that day of the year again. It was held in the Regent's Park Hilton, in London.

Setters present:

Adam, Aeschylus, Ascot, BeRo, Blod (2 persons), **Buff, Bufo, Calmac, Dimitry, Duck, Fenrix** (1 of 2 persons), **Foxglove, Generalissimo, Gong, Gos, Hamamelis, Hellebore, Hotspur, Kea, Lato, Law, Llig, Macbu** (2 persons), **Machiavelli, Mass, Midas, Mr. Lemon, Nibor, Pabulum** (aka **Waldteufel**), **Phalarope, Phi, Phobis, Ploutos, Politicaster, Potin, Salamanca, Simian, Trev, Zander**.

The 83 diners were a cosmopolitan crowd, including a setter visiting from Connecticut (**Hotspur**) and two solvers based in France (one a native French speaker – remarkable when one considers how few native English speakers aspire to the puzzle). Mellowed by pre-prandial drinks (generously sponsored by The Times) and an excellent venison dinner, they were ready for anything the speechmakers could throw at them.

Phi kicked off by passing on messages from Absent Friends – setters who, for one reason or another, could not attend. He also delivered **Leon's** footballing summary of the preceding year's puzzles, which was very well received. The company then joined in a toast to The Times.

In reply John Grant (Crossword Editor of The Times) explained that he had perceived the need for a quality crossword in the Saturday Review, and had leapt at the chance of adopting The Listener Crossword, once the original magazine had folded, particularly as the puzzle came complete with editorial team. Delicate negotiations had been necessary before the puzzle could be moved, and the BBC DG had had to give his blessing. The Times staff were even maintaining the tradition of having no idea what the crossword was about. He concluded with a toast to the setters.

In reply to this John Grimshaw spoke of the problems of being both vetter and proof-reader. He covered the pitfalls waiting in puzzle layout, vanishing clues and insects' legs (see No 3137, Web by **Hen**, not in the year under review) and illustrated his own taxonomy of bar patterns. Not that setters were above reproach – it was remarkable how small a piece of paper could be, and still contain a blank grid, clues and solution. Beyond that there were the complications engendered by setters clueing the wrong word or miscoding Playfairs, all of which combined to make his job the delight it was. He promised to continue for a few more years.

There were seven all-correct solvers contending for the Solver Silver Salver: Ross Beresford, Alan Bishop, Henry Blanco White, Richard England, Ross Lawther, Kenneth MacKenzie and Roger Phillips. By the 'countback' process Ross Beresford had the longest unbroken run of all-correct puzzles and would have retained the Salver. However, he magnanimously suggested that the trophy should pass to another to maintain solvers' interest in winning it. The second longest unbroken run proved to be that of Alan Bishop, who received the Salver for 1992.

Alan revealed that he had organised a ballot of all seven all-correct solvers to ensure a truly democratic winner of the Setters' trophy. Out come the golden envelope and breath was bated all around the room. Joint runners-up were **Bufo's** What For? and **Dimitry's** Russian Revolution but the clear winner was **Sabre's** Merry Mazes. As **Sabre** lives in Tempe, Arizona, in his absence John Grimshaw accepted the Ascot Gold Cup on his behalf.

After this the even more informal part of the evening began.

And so to Birmingham. **Blod** already have a date pencilled in – 27th February 1993. See you then?