

## The Listener Crossword Setters' Dinner 10<sup>th</sup> March 2007 : York

The 2007 Setters' Dinner was held at the Royal York Hotel, next door to York Station. The hotel itself is a fine example of a North Eastern Railway hotel in the grand Victorian style; and the pre-dinner drinks reception took place in the Tiles Room, a very unusual space entirely (as the name suggests!) surfaced with wonderful, ornate ceramics. The main Dinner was then held in the Oak Room (no prizes for originality of names), which is a sumptuously-panelled room, full of the master-carpenter's art.

A total of 83 people attended (from 85 who had booked), including some who had travelled from as far afield as Scotland, Ireland, Europe and the USA. There were 39 setters present: **Aldhelm, Aragon, Ark, BeRo, Bufo, Derek, Dimitry, Elap, Elgin, Gos, Hamamelis, Henry, Homer, Hotspur, Jago, Kea, Lato, Leo, Macbu/2, Machiavelli, Mango, Mespot, Mr Lemon, Mr Magoo, Nibor, Noggs, Pabulum, Pieman, Ploy, Politicaster, Radix, Samuel, Shackleton, Tea Leaves, Third Man, Tiburon, Trev, Verbascum, Viking.**

Apologies were received from 27 other Setters, many of whom now live abroad: for example, **Sabre** and **Arcturus**, both in the USA, **Colleague** in France, **Alberich** in the Czech Republic, **Mass** in Spain and **Phi** in New Zealand. The Toast "To Absent Friends" included the names of **Apex** (Eric Chalkley) and **Notlaw** (Jack Walton), both of whom sadly passed away during the last twelvemonth.

The main business of the evening — apart from enjoying the very respectable repast — was the awarding of the *Solver Silver Salver* for the 2006 run of all-correct solutions. As in recent years, a number of solvers achieved that particular Everest: 14 in fact. Space does not permit the full transcript of my speech detailing their toils, but their names are listed here in honour of their not insignificant achievement. Neil Talbott\*, Geoff Kay\*, Stuart Tarrant, Justin Daddow, Peter Brooksbank\*, Roger Phillips\*, John Green\*, Stephen Mulligan\*, Stephanie Perks and John Minter (daughter and father)\*, Simon Long, Roddy Forman\*, Mark Goodliffe\*, Simon Anthony\* and the actual *Salver* winners — yes, plural — a father-and-son pairing, Denis and Neil Aspland\*. (\* denotes present at the Dinner.)

With so many good solvers around these days, there is a "gentlemen's agreement" that any eligible previous recipient of the *Solver Silver Salver* will waive rights to claim it, and will pass it down the list to the next never-before-winner. Thus, both Simon Anthony (way out in front with 236 not out) and Mark Goodliffe (229 not out) deferred to the Asplands for the 2006 award. But all of the 14 above-named all-corrects received the warm applause of those present. It then fell to Neil Aspland to give the run-down of deliberations between all of the 14 and to announce the winner of the *Ascot Gold Cup*. Using a form of "proportional representation" (or points-scoring), the "Top Five" were announced as: *Digital Diversion* by **Elap** (a mathematical puzzle); *Navigator* by **Sabre**; *Countdown to Re-entry* by **Shackleton** (his debut puzzle, and thus very impressive, in Neil's words, to come above **Sabre** in the listings); *Extra Special Fare* by **The Tall'n**; and the actual winner — *Olde Treasure Hunt* by **Merlin** — a "tour de force" woven round the Sherlock Holmes story of *The Musgrave Ritual*. Unfortunately, **Merlin** was not present, and so the *Gold Cup* is currently in my safe keeping, until it can be handed over at some point fairly soon.

Finally, a new Trophy was instigated this year, courtesy of **Tea Leaves**. With the *Gold Cup* and *Silver Salver*, it was felt that a Bronze award was needed, and so the prize for his (now probably annual) Table Quiz was a Casket full of sweeties, presented to the winning table: and this prize is now called *The Bronze Casket*, to complete the trio. A representative from the victorious Table 10 will need to return it — as will the winners of the other trophies — at next year's Dinner. The date and venue for 2008 are still to be confirmed, but will definitely be end Feb/early March and in the South — possibly Oxfordshire.

Jim Coulson (**Jago**)